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DEVOTIONAL CLASSICS

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MARTHA UPTON LECTURES DELIVERED AT
MANCHESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD

BY

J. M. CONNELL

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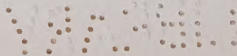
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These lectures were given at the invitation of the Committee of Manchester College during Hilary Term of 1922.

I

ST. AUGUSTINE'S *CONFESSIONS*

THE main purpose of a theological college is to train students for the Christian ministry. The original college was the one which Jesus formed when, by the shores of Galilee, he called Peter and Andrew and James and John from their nets, and prepared them to become fishers of men. There was probably no set course of study, but Jesus could assume in his disciples, as in his hearers generally, a knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, and much of his time in the company of his disciples must have been spent in explaining these Scriptures to them in the light of his own Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Perhaps the account of his talk with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is reminiscent of his method : " Beginning from Moses and from all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke xxiv. 27.)

Since the days when Jesus took in hand the training of the Twelve, other scriptures have been added to the Old Testament ones for the study of his ministers and the edification of his Church. There was, first, the New Testament, containing the records of his life and teaching and the writings of St. Paul and other apostles and early disciples. And, secondly, there are the books of Christian devotion that have come into existence since the canon of the New Testament was closed. It is profoundly

important that ministers of religion should be familiar with this devotional literature, which gives true and beautiful and memorable expression to the spiritual life and thought of so many centuries. But, indeed, no man or woman's education can be regarded as complete which does not include an acquaintance with what the wisest and saintliest teachers of Christendom have known of God and learnt of life and hoped of death. It is about some of the writings of such teachers that I have been asked to speak in this course of lectures.

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The Confessions of St. Augustine is one of the greatest of devotional books. In the extent of its use, and the degree in which it has been valued, its only rivals have been Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. It was written about the year 400, and the *Imitation*, about 1420, so that as compared with that book it had a long start of over a thousand years in its ministry of devout thought and feeling.

Augustine was born at Thagaste, a small town in Numidia, North Africa, in the year 354, and died at Hippo, in the same region, in 430. His life-time, therefore, witnessed the beginnings of the break-up of the Roman Empire. His father was a heathen, until some years after Augustine's birth, but his mother, Monica, was a Christian, and, next to Mary, the mother of Jesus, she is the most famous mother in Christian history. At the age of 16, and at some self-denial on the part of his parents, who were not well off, he was sent to the university of Carthage, where he distinguished himself in his studies, but where, as he says, he led a

very dissipated life. He was saved from worse evil by forming an irregular union, such as even the Christian society of his time hardly censured, with a woman who became the mother of his son, Adeodatus, and to whom he remained faithful for many years. Among his fellow-students at Carthage he found several who shared his intellectual interests, and, in the *Confessions* he has left a memorable and delightful picture of his friendly circle there. "What charmed me in their intercourse," he says, "was the talk, the laughter, the courteous mutual deference, the common study of the masters of eloquence, the comradeship, now grave, now gay, and differences that left no sting, as of a man differing with himself, the spice of disagreement that seasoned the monotony of consent. Each by turns would instruct or listen; the absent were always missed, the present always welcome. Such tokens, springing from the hearts of mutual friends, and displayed by a word, a glance, an expression, by a thousand pretty complaisances, supply the heat that welds souls together, and make one of many." (iv. 8.) Happily that picture, drawn more than fifteen hundred years ago, has been reproduced in the experience of many a group of students in University and College since—and not least frequently here in Oxford.

At the age of 19 the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* (a work, now lost, dealing with the study of philosophy) caused a spiritual awakening. It gave a new direction to his mind, he tells us, and stirred within him a passionate longing for "the immortality of wisdom." Though having from his childhood a profound reverence for the name of Christ, and though still nominally a Christian,

he had hitherto been rather repelled than attracted by organised Christianity ; now, in order to satisfy his newly-awakened needs, he turned to the Christian Scriptures. But he found them little to his taste ; they seemed, he said, “ unworthy to be compared with the stately eloquence of Cicero.”

This reference to Cicero illustrates the influence which the works of the great Roman moralist and orator had on the mind of the age. Jerome, who was a contemporary and correspondent of Augustine, and whose Latin Version of the Scriptures, the Vulgate, was published about the same time as the *Confessions*, tells of a dream he had which reveals the kind of divided spiritual allegiance that was then common among thoughtful men. “ Suddenly,” says Jerome, “ I was caught up in the spirit, and dragged before the Judgment Seat ; and there the light was so brilliant that I cast myself upon the ground, and did not dare to look up. When asked who and what I was, I replied, ‘ I am a Christian.’ But the Judge said, ‘ Thou liest ! Thou art a disciple of Cicero, and not of Christ ; for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also.’ On hearing this I was dumbfounded.” The interest of Augustine and his *Confessions* owes much to the fact that in him we are able to see so clearly the struggle that was going on between the spirit of pagan antiquity and the spirit of Christianity.

Disappointed in the Christian Scriptures on turning to them after Cicero’s *Hortensius* had touched the deeper and purer springs of his being, he began to look elsewhere for guidance and satisfaction. Among the religious cults of the day was that of the Manichaeans, which had

originated in Persia about a century before, and had become in some places, and notably in North Africa, a formidable rival to Christianity. It was a syncretist faith, fundamentally Zoroastrian, but embodying Buddhist, Christian and other elements, and was ascetic in its practices. It seemed to promise all the spiritual help and intellectual enlightenment that Augustine required ; and he allied himself with it, though never in full membership, for the next nine or ten years. It was over his connection with it that his mother, by that time a widow, was so long and deeply distressed. Her anxiety is shown in the story he tells of her going to a bishop and asking him to speak to her son and try to argue him out of the error of his ways. The bishop declined to do this, saying that it would be better to leave Augustine to find out his mistake for himself by further study. When, with tears, she persisted in her request, he still refused ; but he said to her : “ Go thy ways, and God bless thee ; for it cannot be that the son of these tears should perish.”

When Augustine says that the reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* had stirred within him the desire for wisdom, he probably means that the book had awakened him to a sense of the great problems of existence—the problems with which philosophy has to deal—and had set him on the eager quest for their solution. What seems to have attracted him most in Manichaeism was the vast range of speculation which it opened up, and the answers it offered to the questions that had become insistent in his mind—as to the being and nature of God, the origin of creation, and the meaning of the conflict between good and evil of which he was conscious in his own heart.

According to the *Confessions* its answers to these questions interested rather than convinced him. As time went on he became more and more dissatisfied with it, and only delayed severing himself from it in the hope that on meeting its chief exponent, Faustus, its doctrines would be presented to him in a form that he could accept. But at length, after the interview with Faustus, this hope proved illusory.

In the *Confessions* he laments his connection with Manichaeism as the grand mistake of his early life ; laments it as much indeed as he does his moral aberrations. But deeply as he deplores his association with it, and severe as is his denunciation of it, we cannot help thinking that he retained far more of its teaching than he was himself aware of. There can be no doubt as to the fascination it had for him ; and after being under its spell during the most impressionable decade of his life, it is more than likely that its spirit and ideals continued to affect him, and that through him it had a profound influence on the development of Christian doctrine. That there were excellent reasons for his abandonment of it, we can well believe ; but that it was better than, in his recoil from it, he represents it in the *Confessions*, there is ample evidence. It held Christ in reverence, and was sincere in its endeavour to carry out the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Some years before writing the *Confessions*, Augustine sent a letter to the Manichaeans, and it is interesting and pleasant to find him saying, in a passage that has become classic on the subject of toleration : “ Let those treat you angrily who know not the labour necessary to find truth, and the amount of caution required to avoid error. Let those

treat you angrily who know not with what sighs and groans the least particle of the knowledge of God is obtained. For my part, I—who after much and long-continued bewilderment attained at last to the discovery of the simple truth—I can on no account treat you angrily; for I must bear with you now as patiently as I had to bear with myself, and I must be as patient towards you as my friends were with me, when I went madly and blindly astray in your belief.”¹

On completing his studies at Carthage, Augustine became a teacher of literature in Thagaste, his native town. But the death of a dear friend there caused him so much distress that, in order to get away from grief-haunted scenes, he returned to Carthage. The chapters in the *Confessions* in which he tells of the loss of that early friend are among the most moving and self-revealing in the book. “This sorrow fell like darkness on my heart, and wherever I looked I saw nothing but death. My eyes sought him everywhere and found him not. I hated the familiar scenes because he was not there. I became a riddle to myself, and questioned my soul why she was so heavy and disquieted me so sorely, and I could find no answer . . . I had lost my joy . . . Well did the poet say of his friend, ‘O thou half of my soul!’ For I felt that my soul and his had been but one in two bodies, and life seemed horrible to me, because he was not there,”—in such words as these does he express his grief and bewilderment. (iv. 4, 5, 6.)

¹ Unhappily the tolerant spirit which breathes in this passage did not continue to animate Augustine. By the fateful interpretation which he gave to the Gospel saying “Compel them to come in,” he became the father of persecution in the Christian Church.

Among his friends there is none who figures so prominently in the *Confessions* as Alypius, none indeed with whom, from first to last, he continued so intimate ; “ the brother of my soul,” he calls him. Alypius was younger than himself, and had been his pupil at Thagaste. After Augustine’s return to Carthage, Alypius came there also, in order to continue his studies ; but owing to some unpleasantness that had arisen between his father and Augustine, he did not at once attend the latter’s lectures ; and Augustine heard with regret that he was wasting much of his time at the circus. One day, however, Alypius entered Augustine’s lecture room quite unexpectedly, and listened with the other students to the lecture. In the course of it Augustine happened to use an illustration from the games at the circus, and went on to speak of the folly of frequenting these games too much, without thinking at all of Alypius in that connection. But, says Augustine, “ he took my words home to himself, and thought that I had so spoken only on his account ; and what would have made another angry with me, made that good lad angry with himself, and more devoted to me. For long ago thou didst say and write it in thy book, ‘ Rebuke a wise man and he will love thee.’ ” (vi. 7.) That is one of the many human touches that help to make the *Confessions* so interesting.

Augustine remained in Carthage for about seven years, eager in the studies connected with his particular work, and in the search for satisfying answers to the questions which Cicero’s *Hortensius* had awakened in his mind. By the time he went to Rome he seems to have lost all faith in Manichaeism ; but no other system had as yet taken its place. At Rome he began

to study the writings of the more sceptical Academics, and was inclined for a while to agree with them in thinking that "all is doubtful, and that certainty is unattainable by man." (v. 10.) This leaning to a sceptical philosophy, however, does not appear to have lasted long. After a stay of only a few months at Rome he went to Milan to take up the position of Public Teacher of Rhetoric. There he turned to the works of the Neo-Platonists, most likely the *Enneads* of Plotinus, in hope of finding what he had so long been seeking. And Neo-Platonism broke upon him as a revelation. One great service in particular it did him : it taught him the spiritual nature of God. Hitherto he had conceived of the Deity as an infinite substance within which the created universe existed, like a vast sponge in a limitless ocean ; but from the Neo-Platonists he learnt that God is Spirit, the Life of all things, the Soul of all souls, the Reason that gives law and order to the world and makes it intelligible. His references to Neo-Platonism are for the most part grateful and appreciative. He speaks of it as "the elder sister of Christianity," and as the "vestibule" through which he entered the Christian Church. It remained one of the most potent influences in his thought, and through him it became one of the most potent influences also in the thought of Christendom. Along with the Platonism of the Pauline and Johannine writings of the New Testament, it has been a main source of mystical doctrine in the Church from generation to generation.

The writings of Plotinus were read by Augustine in the Latin translation made by Victorinus, a philosopher of distinction who had been converted to Christianity.

The story of that conversion made a deep impression on Augustine, and was among the things that led him to think that there was more truth in Christianity than he had given it credit for. But soon after settling in Milan, he came under an influence that was destined to be decisive in bringing about his own conversion to Christianity—the influence of Bishop Ambrose, a man of saintliest character and of rare oratorical and literary gifts. Augustine tells us that he had been attracted to the Church by the fame of Ambrose's oratory and by some special friendliness which the good bishop had shown him. "I began to love him," he says, "not at first as a teacher of the truth, which I despaired of finding in thy Church, but as a fellow-creature who was kind to me. I listened attentively to his sermons, not with the right attitude of mind, but criticising his eloquence, whether it was equal to his reputation, or whether its stream was broader or narrower than men reported. Thus I hung eagerly upon his expressions, while as regards the subject I remained a cool or contemptuous looker on, delighted only with the charm of his style. . . . Yet with the phrases which I loved, the facts which I neglected began to trickle into my mind, for I could not keep them apart. And while I opened my heart to welcome the eloquence of his speech, I began, though only step by step, to feel the truth of it." (v. 13, 14.) One wonders what would have happened had Ambrose been either less careful and accomplished in his oratory, or less friendly in his manner; would Augustine have remained a professor of rhetoric and been lost to Christendom?

Under the spell of the new influences that were at

work within him, Augustine began again the study of the Christian Scriptures. In an interesting passage in the *Confessions* he tells how he found in the Scriptures things that were lacking in the books of the Neo-Platonists. These books, he declares, have nothing to say of the tears of repentance, the broken and contrite heart, the salvation of the people, the cup of our redemption ; they have nothing equivalent to the call, " Come unto me all ye that labour," nor any sympathy with the meek and lowly in heart. It is significant that what appealed to him most in Christianity at this critical time were its essentially moral and spiritual features.

His mother, in her solicitude for him, had followed him to Milan, and she rejoiced to find that his attitude towards Christianity had begun to change, and that he was attending the services of the Church. He was between two and three years at Milan, and it was in the second year that the great spiritual crisis of his life, his conversion, took place. It seemed to come with startling suddenness, but in reality it had long been preparing. It was not an intellectual change only or chiefly, due to the dawning of truth on a mind that had long groped in darkness and uncertainty and followed lights that proved illusory ; it was above all a moral and spiritual change, in which the high instincts of his nature had at last overcome the baser, and the heart, long restless, had found the peace of God. In a famous passage in the *Confessions* he tells how, as he sat in a garden one day, full of inward questioning, he heard the voice as of a child at play, saying, " Take up and read, take up and read." (*Tolle, lege, tolle, lege.*) Opening a volume of St. Paul's Epistles, he read the words on which

his eyes first fell : “ Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying ; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.” “ No further did I read, nor did I require to do so. As I reached the end of the sentence, the light of peace seemed to be shed abroad in my heart, and every shadow of doubt melted away.” (viii. 12.)

His conversion is an event of first-rate importance in Christian history—only comparable to that of St. Paul. Soon after it he resigned his position as Professor of Rhetoric, and spent some months at a country house which had been lent to him ; and with him was a party which included his friend Alypius, his son, Adeodatus, his brother Navigius, two cousins and two pupils ; and Monica too was there, “ ruling us like a mother, and serving us like a daughter.” It has been compared to a reading party from an English university. An account of it is given in the Dialogues which were written at the time and are included among Augustine’s works. There was much talk on philosophical subjects, and opinions were at times sharply divided ; and we are told how on one occasion Monica happened to come in when some point was in dispute, and how she was asked for her opinion upon it. When she said with a smile that she was no philosopher, Augustine explained to her that the word philosophy meant the love of wisdom, and then went on to say that, as she loved wisdom more than any of them, she was the best philosopher, and that they ought all to enrol themselves as her pupils. At this, we are told, she laughed outright, and said, “ I never heard you talk such nonsense in all your life ! ”

But besides directing the studies of his pupils during those months in the country, and taking part in the discussions, Augustine was earnestly considering the spiritual change which he had experienced, and the alteration in all his plans of life which that change appeared to him to involve. On returning to Milan he was baptized by Ambrose, as were also Alypius and Adeodatus.¹ His baptism seemed to him ever after to mark definitely the end of his old life and the beginning of his new one. So conscious was he of the spiritual rebirth of which his baptism was the outward sign, that he was able to write about his former unregenerate self as though he were writing about another person, whom he once had known. His remarkable power of self-analysis is shown in the account which he gives at much length of an escapade of his boyhood. With some companions he had made a raid on an orchard. In looking back on it, he is puzzled to understand how he could have been guilty of such a thing, and he passes from one possible explanation to another until he arrives at the true one. He did not want the pears; he had better ones of his own; and after stealing them he had flung them away untasted. Had he stolen them simply from love of stealing? That could hardly be the case; for there is nothing surely to love in theft. Had the pleasure, then, been in doing wrong without being caught and punished? Neither was that a satisfactory motive. And then he hits on an explanation

¹ According to an ancient tradition Ambrose and Augustine composed and sang the *Te Deum* at the conclusion of the ceremony; but the authorship of this grandest of all the hymns of the Church is now ascribed to a contemporary—Nicetus, Bishop of Remesiana from 392 to 414.

that anticipates what is said now-a-days about the herd instinct, which is at bottom the feeling of comradeship and is so powerful either for good or evil. It was this feeling that had impelled him to act as he had done. "I should not," he says, "have done it by myself . . . I should certainly not have done it by myself." (ii. 4ff.)

In the self-accusings with which the *Confessions* abound, there is evidence of an almost morbid sensitiveness of conscience. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* was certainly not his motto in speaking of his dead self. His intention apparently is to represent himself at his worst in order that the Divine grace in saving him may be the more evident. He is troubled even by the sins of his infancy. He has seen a babe at the breast jealous, and he is sure that he was himself at that early age guilty of the like delinquency. "So small a child and so great a sinner!" is his comment as he tells of the unwillingness with which he had learnt his first lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic. He speaks of sin as the resistance made by man to the laws of God—to that divine discipline "which begins with the school-master's rod, and ends with the martyr's fiery trial." (i. 14). Yet with all the fault he has to find with himself as a child, he sees much reason for gratitude as he recalls that period of his life. He remembers how glad he had felt to be alive and to have the use of his senses; the delight he had found in the discovery of truth, "even in little things and in reflections on little things," and the joy and comfort he had even then begun to find in friendship. "To God," he says, "I will give loud thanks for all the good that belonged to me as a boy." (i. 20.) In his record of the sins of his youth and early manhood,

we see there was indeed much that was blameworthy, even after due allowance is made for the moral standards of a half-pagan society ; yet we learn also that he had made many an effort after purity and self-control. His experience had a profound effect in determining his view that salvation is rather the work of Divine grace than of man's will. Never was there a religious teacher whose doctrine was more an interpretation of personal experience than was his.

After his baptism Augustine with his mother and brother and son left Milan and came to Ostia, one of the ports of Rome, whence they meant to set sail for return to Africa. One of the most entrancing passages in the *Confessions* is that in which he describes a conversation with his mother.

“ It happened, I believe, by thy secret workings, that she and I were leaning by ourselves at a window, from which we looked down on the garden of our house. There in Ostia by Tiber, away from the crowd, we were recruiting ourselves for the voyage, after the fatigue of our long journey. We were conversing sweetly together, and, forgetting those things that were behind, and reaching forth unto those things that were before, we asked ourselves, in the presence of the Truth which thou art, what will be the nature of that eternal life of the saints, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man. With our souls we panted for the heavenly streams of thy fountain, the fountain of life which is with thee, that, sprinkled thence according to our capacity, we might in some measure meditate on that high theme. And as our converse drew to this conclusion, that the sweetest delight of sense in

the brightest earthly sunshine was not worthy to be compared, nor even mentioned, with the happiness of that life, we soared with glowing affection towards the Self-same, mounting step by step through all material things, and through heaven itself, whence sun and moon and stars shed their radiance upon earth. And still higher did we ascend by inward musing and by our talk and by marvelling at thy works. And we came to our own minds, and passed beyond them so as to arrive at the region of unfailing plenty, where thou feedest Israel for ever with the food of truth, where Life is the Wisdom by which all things come to be, both the things that have been and the things that shall be ; and Itself never comes to be, but is, as it was and shall be evermore, because in it is neither past nor future but present only, for it is eternal. And as we talked and yearned after it, we touched it for an instant with the whole force of our hearts. And we sighed, and, leaving there locked up the first fruits of the spirit, we heard again the babble of our own tongues, wherein each word has a beginning and ending. What is like thy word, O Lord, which endureth for ever, which never grows old, and maketh all things new ? We said then : ‘ If the tumult of the flesh were hushed ; hushed the images of earth and waters and air, hushed the heavens, and hushed the soul itself, so that it should pass beyond itself and not think of itself ; if all dreams were hushed, and all sensuous revelations, and every tongue and every symbol ; if all that comes and goes were hushed—they all proclaim to him that hath an ear : ‘ We made not ourselves : He made us who abideth for ever ’—Now if, having uttered this, they held their peace, turning the ear to him who made them; and if

he alone spoke, not by them but for himself, and we heard his word, not by any fleshly tongue, nor by an angel's voice, nor in the thunder, nor in any similitude, but his voice whom we love in these his creatures—if we heard him without the intermediation by any of these things—Just now we reached out, and with one flash of thought touched the Eternal Wisdom that abides above all—If this endured, and all other inferior modes of vision were taken away, and this alone were to ravish the beholder, and absorb him, and plunge him in mystic joy, might not eternal life be like this moment of comprehension for which we sighed? Is not this the meaning of 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?' " (ix. 10.)

But the opportunities for such high converse between mother and son were soon to end. A few days later, and while they were still at Ostia, Monica became ill and died. Augustine closed her eyes, and he tells how great a tide of sorrow surged up in his heart, but how he sought to restrain in himself and in those about him the outward manifestations of grief, considering that it was not fitting to indulge in loud lamentations over one who, as he said, "neither died unhappy nor was altogether dead." The sudden breaking off of the "sweet and dear habit of living together" left an aching wound in his heart; but, he says, "I was full of joy in her testimony when, in that her last illness, flattering my dutifulness, she called me 'kind,' and said with great emotion of love that she had never heard any harsh or reproachful word come out of my mouth against her." (ix. 12.)

If the *Confessions* were nothing but the memorial of a mother's love and devotion, and of a son's gratitude,

it would be an immortal book. The story of Monica, believing in her son always, praying for him, following him over sea and land, has gripped the heart of readers throughout the ages, and will continue to do so. She must have been a noble woman. "Often," says Augustine, "would Ambrose, when he saw me, congratulate me on having such a mother."

The impressions we get of people in the *Confessions* are unforgettable. They are portraits drawn by a master hand. What could be finer than the picture that is given of the great Ambrose? Augustine always thought of him as his spiritual father and of the three years he spent at Milan as the most sacred and precious period of his life. He recalls Ambrose as he had seen him deep in the study of some book, "his eye wandering along the page while his heart searched out the meaning." He remembers the great preacher's favourite text, "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." He recalls the beauty and dignity of the worship, to which the hymn-singing—then a daring innovation made by Ambrose—contributed so greatly. He recalls the hymns themselves, Ambrose's own, and what a comfort and inspiration they have been to him ever since. Thus in his anguish at the loss of his mother, as he lay on his bed there had come into his mind the one beginning, *Deus Creator omnium* :

Creator of the earth and sky,
Ruling the firmament on high,
Clothing the day with robes of light,
Blessing with gracious sleep the night,

That rest may comfort weary men,
And brace to useful toil again,
And soothe awhile the harassed mind,
And sorrow's heavy load unbind. (ix. 12.)

Augustine was 33 when he returned to Africa. A few years later he was appointed Bishop of Hippo, a small town on the Numidian coast. He often talked of what he had passed through in his long search for truth and inward peace ; and it was natural that those who listened to him should urge him to write it all down, so that others might be helped by his experience. Thus it was in response to their request, as well as to satisfy a desire of his own heart, that the *Confessions* came to be written. He wanted, as he said, to utter in the hearing of God and of " the believing sons of men, the sharers of his joy and the partners of his mortality," the faith that was in him, to tell of the way in which he had been led to it, and to express his thankfulness for that Divine guidance, and for all the blessed influences that had been about him since his life began. (x. 4, xi. 1.) The *Confessions* is his autobiography, written, as it were, on his knees in the presence of God.

Augustine was one of the most original minds the world has known—original in the sense that he set men thinking in so many new and fruitful ways. His *Confessions* is among the books which, in Dr. Wicksteed's phrase, " perpetually provoke us to deeper and more fearless thought." But it is not mainly because in it a mind of rare penetration discusses the profoundest of all questions ; nor because in it we have a wonderful mirror of thought and life in the transitional period

between the old world and the new ; nor because much in Christian theology is traceable to its influence, and its author was the great Doctor of the Church, to whose authority Catholic and Protestant have alike appealed—it is not because of these things chiefly that we still read and treasure it. These things, it is true, contribute enormously to the interest of the book ; but what constitutes its greatest and most abiding value is the revelation it gives of a soul of extraordinary power and depth and beauty, a soul that, sinning much, had been forgiven, a soul that, perplexed and sorrowing almost beyond endurance, had found a foothold for faith and hope. It is a story of spiritual adventure greatly told. Like the Bible itself, it has a universal significance, helping each reader to interpret his own experience. The paths of spiritual pilgrimage are many and varied, but the end is always the same, and it was set forth in the opening chapter of the *Confessions* in words that have reverberated throughout the ages : “ Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee.”

II

ST. PATRICK'S *CONFESSION* & ST. ADAMNAN'S *LIFE OF ST. COLUMBA*

ST. AUGUSTINE, in a well-known passage in the *Confessions*, extols the power of memory. He had carried over into his work as a Christian teacher much that he had learnt from Neo-Platonism, and among the rest was the doctrine that all knowledge is reminiscence. According to this doctrine we recognise a thing as true because in some former time—it may be in some former existence—we have known it. The business of teaching is to remind us of things we have forgotten. All our effort after knowledge is just our striving to recall things we have already known. It is so even with the effort after the knowledge of God. Had we never known him we should feel no longing after him. It is by the power of memory that we are able to come back to him, even as it is by the power of memory that birds are able to find their nests and beasts their lairs. It is this memory that keeps us restless till we return to God. "Great is the power of memory!" exclaims Augustine; "O my God, a profound and infinite manifoldness!"

History is the memory of the race; and it too is a "profound and infinite manifoldness." It is one of the earliest forms of literature. All the early historians, and the Hebrew ones most of all, wrote under a strong sense of the divine interposition and operation in the

affairs of men and nations. It was largely to give expression to this sense of God in history that the Hebrew Scriptures came into being. One of the old prophets declares that when Israel was a child the Lord loved him and called him ; and that loving and calling and all that resulted from it was for the Israelite an unceasing subject of wonder and gratitude. And surely in looking back on the history of our own nation, we too have cause for wonder and thankfulness ; for not without the love and election of God have we as a people become what we are and been able to do the work that we have done in the world. When we remember the feeble beginnings of our national life away back in the dim centuries, the small extent of these islands in which our ancestors had their home, and then think of the mighty energy and vast area of the present Empire, we may well believe that from of old our people have been divinely destined for great uses and services. “ How marvellous it all is ! ” exclaims Lord Rosebery in an essay on the British Empire. “ Built not by saints and angels, but the work of men’s hands ; cemented with men’s honest blood and with a world of tears ; welded by the best brains of centuries past ; not without the taint and reproach incidental to all human work, but constructed on the whole with pure and splendid purpose. Human, and yet not wholly human, for the most heedless and the most cynical must see the finger of the Divine. Growing as trees grow while others slept ; led by the faults of others as well as by the character of our fathers ; reaching with the ripple of a resistless tide over tracts and islands and continents, until our little Britain woke up to find herself the foster-mother of nations and the

source of united Empires. Do we not hail in this less the energy and fortune of a race than the supreme direction of the Almighty?¹ ”

And if, like the Hebrews, we should seek to form a Bible illustrating God's inspiration and revelation throughout the history of our people, there would be no lack of material. For the story of our beginnings the material would be peculiarly rich, and specially valuable in this respect would be the *Confession* of St. Patrick, and Adamnan's *Life of St. Columba*.

Christianity was introduced into the British Isles during the Roman occupation. Of the circumstances of its introduction—whether by Roman soldiers or accredited missionaries or others—we know very little. By the latter part of the fourth century, however, it had churches here and there among the native population even as far north as the Wall of Antoninus, between the Forth and Clyde. St. Patrick is commonly believed to have been born in the neighbourhood of Dumbarton Rock, a fort at the western end of that Wall. About his birth-place, however, as about so much else in regard to him, there is a great deal of uncertainty. The date usually given for his birth is 373, but Prof. Bury puts it fifteen years later. He came of Christian parentage. His father was a farmer, and also held office in the church as a deacon. The Roman rule was beginning then to relax its hold on Britain, and the coasts were exposed to the attacks of marauding bands coming from overseas. A party of these freebooters landed near Patrick's home when he was 16 years of age and carried him off as a slave to the north of Ireland, which he

¹ *Miscellanies*, II. pp. 262-3.

speaks of as "the ultimate places of the earth"—describing it thus perhaps, as Prof. Bury says, because Ireland was outside the Roman Empire; perhaps also because there was as yet little or no Christianity there.

On the hill-sides of Slemish in Antrim, according to tradition, he tended sheep for six years; and there—was it beside some bush of flaming gorse?—he had an experience like that of Moses of old when leading his sheep about "the hill of God," an experience which resulted in an inward change and affected his whole destiny. "There," he tells us in his *Confession*, "the Lord opened the understanding of my unbelief, that, even though late, I might recall to mind my sins, and that I might be converted with all my heart to the Lord my God, who regarded my humility, and took pity on the youth of my ignorance, and protected me before I knew him, and before I had discernment, or could distinguish between good and evil, and strengthened and consoled me as a father his son." It is not to be wondered that the exiled lad should recall the religious teaching in which he had been brought up, and in his lonely broodings should have his spirit stirred to a great fervour of devotion. "The love of God, and the fear of Him, increased more and more," he says, "so that in a single day I prayed as often as a hundred times, and by night almost as frequently, even while I was sojourning in the woods and on the mountain. Before daybreak I used to be awakened to prayer in snow, frost and rain, and I felt no hurt, because the spirit was then fervent in me." But along with this fervour of devotion, there was the desire to return to his own home; and at last he ran away, and after trudging two hundred miles he

reached a port, where he found a ship on the point of sailing. After some hesitation the captain allowed him to come on board, engaging him probably to help in managing the Celtic hounds which were part of the freight. The vessel was bound for Gaul, but that mattered little to Patrick. Anywhere out of Ireland, and any way, even a very long way round, that would bring him home at last, was welcome to him.

Gaul had suffered desolation from invading Vandals and Sueves and other barbarians—desolation so terrible as to make a contemporary Gallic poet say that “If the whole ocean had poured its waters into the fields of Gaul, its vasty waves would have spared more than the invaders.”¹ Patrick and his companions travelled through Gaul to Italy, experiencing much hardship by the way. In Italy he seems to have parted from the rest of the company. On his homeward journey he found a resting place for a while, perhaps for some years, on the little island of Lerinus, off the coast of Provence, where a monastery had recently been established. There probably he came under the spell of the monastic ideal, and learnt much that was to prove useful to him in the work of his life. When at last he reached home he was warmly welcomed by his kinsfolk and was glad to be among them again. But ere long he began to feel that a settled and sheltered life among his own people was not to be his. A strong missionary impulse was stirring within him; and his thoughts were ever turning compassionately to the heathen in the land of his captivity. At the critical times in his life he believed that he had guidance from dreams, and such leading was not wanting

¹ See *The Life of St. Patrick*, by J. B. Bury, p. 35.

now. "I beheld," he says, "in a vision of the night a man called Victoricus, coming as it were from Ireland with letters innumerable. And he gave me one of them which contained 'The Voice of the Irish,' and while I was reading aloud the beginning of the letter, methought that at that very moment I heard the voice of those who lived beside the wood of Foclad, which is near the Western Sea. And as with one voice they thus exclaimed, 'We beseech thee, O holy youth, that thou come hither and still walk with us.' And I was greatly affected at heart and could read no more ; and so I awoke. Thanks be to God that after many years the Lord granted to them according to their request." His friends tried to persuade him to remain with them, and being himself intensely home-loving, he was loth to go again into exile. But the Divine call was urgent ; and thus it was that, as he says, he "came to the heathen Irish to preach the Gospel." His success in that work astonished no one more than it did himself ; for he was a man of rare humility, and very conscious of his limitations, especially of what he calls his "rusticity and lack of learning." There were a number of Christians, and perhaps a few Christian Churches, in Ireland before he began his labours ; but the conversion of the people was practically his achievement, or rather, as he would have said emphatically, it was "the gift of God" through him.

His *Confession* is not a confession in the ordinary sense, not a disclosure, that is, of his faults and misdeeds, though it begins and ends with the description of himself as "Patrick the sinner." It is rather an apology or defence of himself against some who were jealous of his success and had spoken disparagingly of him. Thus it is

not unlike St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians. One of his detractors, a former friend, to whom he had given his confidence, had declared that Patrick was unworthy of the office of bishop, to which he had been raised, because of a sin committed in his boyhood, some forty years before. Others regarded him as unfitted for the office because of his lack of culture. And Patrick admits that everything that is said against him is true. He owns sorrowfully to the sin of his boyhood ; he confesses that he is no scholar, only a plain, uneducated man. How then, he asks, was it that he had been able to bring the heathen Irish to the feet of Christ, and how came he to be appointed Bishop over them ? He could only answer that it had all been brought about by the grace of God. " I was," he says, " like a stone lying in the deep mire, and He that is powerful came and in his mercy lifted me up, and placed me on the top of the wall." The stone which some of the builders would have rejected had been made the head of the corner ; and all through the *Confession* there is the acknowledgement that " it is the Lord's doing," and that it is marvellous in Patrick's own eyes.

But although Patrick was not much of a scholar he must have been a man of great practical ability. The Irish people in his time were divided up into various clans or tribes and petty kingdoms ; with one " high king " or overlord, having his seat at Tara ; and their conversion bespeaks a force of character and a resource and skill in the management of men that belong only to the greatest leaders. Above all Patrick was possessed of a consuming zeal for the Gospel he preached, and an apostolic passion for souls ; and he had such a sense of

the presence and help of God as made him regardless of danger and incapable of admitting defeat. For the heathen people among whom he worked he had a real affection, and for all that was worthy in them he had an ever ready word of appreciation. Once, it is said, some one spoke to him about Ossian, the heathen poet, describing him as one "who never asked anything from any man, and never refused any man anything; for himself he wished only to keep the head with which he ate, and the feet with which he walked." "That is a great character," said Patrick.

As to the kind of doctrine which Patrick taught we may learn something from the story which is told of his meeting with the two daughters of the king of Meath. They had come to a fountain near which Patrick and others who were strangers to them, were seated, and they asked, "Whence have ye come and where is your home?" And Patrick answered, no doubt with a smile, "It were better for you to believe in the true God whom we worship than to ask questions about ourselves." Then the elder girl said, "Who is God, and where is God, and of whom is he God? . . . Is he in heaven or on earth, in the sea, in the hill places, in the valleys? Tell us how we may know him." And Patrick answered: "Our God is the God of all men, the God of heaven and earth, of sea and rivers, of sun and moon and stars, of the lofty mountain and the lowly valleys, the God above heaven, and in heaven, and under heaven; he has his dwelling around heaven and earth and sea and all that in them is. He inspires all, he dominates all, he supports all. He lights the light of the sun, he furnishes the light of night; he has made springs in the dry land, and has set stars to

minister to the greater lights. He has a Son co-eternal with himself, and like unto himself. The Son is not younger than the Father, nor the Father older than the Son. And the Holy Spirit breathes in them. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not divided. I wish to unite you with the Heavenly King, as ye are daughters of an earthly one. Believe."¹ And they believed, and were baptized in the fountain there and then.

Under such teaching the people forsook the Druid altars and adopted the new faith, "a people," as Patrick says, "whom the Lord took from the ends of the earth, as he formerly promised through his prophets."

Patrick's sympathetic nature, which reveals itself in every line of the *Confession*, must, as I suggested, have been one great secret of his success in bringing the heathen Irish to Christ. The tenderness of his heart comes out in his sensitiveness to the reproaches that were being cast at him. It was no mere offended self-love that made him complain of his detractors, and made him seek to justify himself in the eyes of the world. It was because he felt that this detraction was poisoning the springs of his influence for good over the souls of those whom he had gathered into the Christian Church, and because it tended to make men irresponsible to the love that welled up in his own heart towards them, that he decided to write the *Confession*.

One of the most noteworthy things about the *Confession* is the absence of miracles, while the lives of the saint are full of them. If we ask why Patrick records none, perhaps the best reply is, because his whole life seemed to him a transcendent miracle. That God had

¹ J. B. Bury, *Life of St. Patrick*, pp. 138-40.

chosen just him, out of so many, him the sinner, the least of all the faithful, unlearned as he was, to carry out such a great work as the conversion of the Irish—that filled his soul with amazement ! God had been with him, besetting him behind and before. As he says in the poem, called his “ Breastplate ” :

God's virtue to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak to me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to secure me
Against snares of demons,
Against seductions of vices,
Against lusts of nature,
Against every one who wishes ill to me,
Afar and near,
Alone and in a multitude

—in the sense of this Divinity that encompassed him and shaped his ends, life became for Patrick a perpetual miracle.

St. Patrick is supposed to have died in 463, The most famous of his successors, Columba, was born in the north of Ireland nearly sixty years later, in 521. He was of royal lineage, being descended from one of the kings whom Patrick had converted to Christianity. During the sixty years much had been built on the foundation laid by Patrick, and the people had been more com-

pletely won to the Christian faith. Many monasteries had come into existence ; but the greatest development in this direction seems to have taken place in Columba's own time, mainly through the efforts of those who are called the Twelve Apostles of Ireland, one of whom was Columba himself. These monasteries, such as the one at Clonmacnoise, founded by St. Kieran, became great schools of learning, which made Ireland famous throughout Christendom.

It is not however as a founder of monasteries in Ireland that Columba is chiefly remembered. Rather is it for founding the one on the island of Iona, whence he effected the conversion of the Picts of Scotland, and sent missionaries throughout England and to the continent.

It is interesting, as illustrating the love of learning that characterised the Irish monasteries of the time, to recall the story that it was a dispute as to the possession of a book which resulted in Columba's leaving Ireland. In his thirty-ninth year, we are told, while visiting Clonard, he secretly made a copy of a beautiful Psalter, kept by the Abbot Finian in the church. The Abbot however discovered the fact, and demanded the copy as his right. The book had cost Columba some sleepless nights, and he stoutly refused to surrender it. Unable to agree, the disputants appealed to Diarmit, the chief king of Ireland ; and his judgement was : " To every cow her calf, and to every book its copy." " This is an unjust decision, O Diarmit, and I will be avenged," exclaimed Columba ; and avenged he was on the battlefield of Culdremhe, where Diarmit was defeated. But Columba nevertheless found it necessary or at least expedient to leave the country.

Columba must be numbered among the real makers of the world. In the year 563, impelled partly by political circumstances and considerations, including sympathy with the Irish colonists in what is now called Argyleshire, but inspired also by true missionary zeal for the spread of the Christian faith, he set sail from Derry in a coracle for the west coast of Scotland, accompanied by a band of twelve disciples. It was with much sorrow they left their own country, and we are told how in the course of the voyage they landed on an island from which they could still see the Irish coast, and of their saying to one another: "We must not make our abode here, lest, with our fatherland always in sight, we should be tempted to go back, and the work that God has given us to do be left undone." And so they set sail again, and came at last to the ocean-swept little island of Iona, which is divided by a narrow strip of sea from the Isle of Mull. In Iona they settled down, so far as a life like theirs of constant going to and fro on their missionary labours can be thought of as settled; and they learnt to love the island because of the happy comradeship in work and prayer of which it was the scene and centre, and because of its own wild beauty.

In the whole vast range of mediaeval hagiology there is probably no more interesting and delightful book than Adamnan's *Life of St. Columba*. It has been said by Prof. Bury that the hagiologist of the middle ages "may be compared to the modern novelist; he provided literary recreation for the public, and he had to consider the public taste."¹ It is evident that many of the lives of the saints were written by men who let their imagina-

¹ *Life of St. Patrick*, p. 205.

tions work quite freely and invented miracle stories in response to the popular demand. There was, of course, a readiness on the part of the writers to believe any tales they heard of marvellous things done, or predictions made by their heroes, and to record such things without submitting them to critical enquiry ; but it is not, as a rule, difficult to distinguish between the *bona fide* biographer, whose desire is to give a true life of his saint, and the mere romancer. And I think we may take it that Adamnan's *Life of St. Columba* is as faithful a record as could have been written in that time when belief in the miraculous was so universal, so unquestioned.

Columba died in 597—the year that Augustine and his monks set foot in England. Adamnan was born only twenty-seven or twenty-eight years later ; so that, when he became a monk at Iona there were some around him who had known Columba, and from them he gathered much of the information that he put into the *Life*. The stories which he relates, he had heard again and again by the monastery fire and elsewhere ; and the facts and incidents that form the foundation of them had probably all received their miraculous setting before he began to write. More and more had every detail of the saint's life come to be seen through an atmosphere of miracle and in a spirit of wondering love. So the methods of historical criticism need to be applied to such a work as Adamnan's, just as they have been applied to the Gospels ; and, as in the case of the Gospels, they enable us to distinguish to a large extent between the core of truth and the covering of myth and legend, and to gain from the miracle stories much valuable light on the personality about whom they are told. Take, for

instance, Adamnan's beautiful story about Columba and the crane. Here it is as Adamnan tells it.

“ Once when the saint was living in the isle of Iona, calling one of the brethren to him, he thus addresses him : ‘ On the third day from this now dawning, thou must keep a look out on the western part of this isle, sitting on the sea-shore ; for from the northern region of Ireland a certain guest, a crane, driven by the winds through long, circling aerial flights, will arrive very weary and fatigued after the ninth hour of the day ; and, its strength almost exhausted, it will fall and lie before thee on the shore, and thou wilt take care to lift it up kindly and carry it to a neighbouring house, and there wilt hospitably harbour it and attend to it for three days and three nights, and carefully feed it. At the end of three days, refreshed, and unwilling to sojourn longer with us, it will return with fully regained strength to the sweet region of Ireland whence it originally came. And I thus earnestly commend it to thee for that it came from the place of our own fatherland.’ The brother obeys, and on the third day, after the ninth hour, as commanded, he awaits the coming of the expected guest ; and when it comes he raises it from the shore where it fell ; carries it, weak as it was, to the hospice ; feeds it in its hunger. And to him, on his return to the monastery in the evening, the saint, not by way of enquiry but of statement, says, ‘ God bless thee, my son, because thou hast well attended our stranger guest ; and it will not tarry long in exile, but after three days will return to its country.’ And just as the saint predicted the event also proved. For having been harboured for three days, raising itself on

high by flight from the ground in the presence of its ministering host, and considering for a little while its course in the air, it returned across the ocean to Ireland in a straight line of flight, on a calm day." (I. xlviiii.)

Now we may be sure that Columba cared for this bird, not only for the sake of Ireland, his fatherland, whence it had come, but also because his heart was full of love and sympathy for all God's creatures, and especially for all helpless and hapless and suffering things. And we may assume that the real facts in the story are something like these: that the bird, after being driven from its home by the storm, and vainly struggling to get back, had landed quite exhausted on the shore of Iona. There one of the monks picked it up, and brought it to the monastery; and Columba, seeing it, and taking pity on it, gave instructions that it should be cared for as a "stranger guest" until it should have recovered sufficiently to resume its journey, which indeed it was able to do in a few days. Such, we take it, was the origin or substance of the story; but the prediction that the bird would come in three days, stay three days and then depart, belongs to the miraculous setting or embroidery, which hearers and readers of the sixth and seventh centuries demanded in all that was told them of their saints.

Columba and his monks in Iona found incitements to devotion in the mists and in the roar of the sea. The discipline of the monastery was strict, and the life hard as became a true *Militia Christi*. Columba believed, like St. Benedict, that idleness is the enemy of the soul; and the brethren were all set to some form of manual labour as well as to their specially religious duties; or

rather we may say that toil at the bench or writing desk, in the fields or on the sea, was thought of as part of their religion. And what wonderful things they accomplished, on the island itself, and in the places near and far to which they went as missionaries ! Iona became a centre of education and civilization as well as of evangelization. In the scriptorium of the monastery, beautifully illuminated Bibles and prayer books were made for the use of the people who, all over Scotland and the north of England, were being brought to the faith of Christ through the preaching of Columba's monks. At Iona, too, the art of healing was studied ; and from across the narrow sound that separated the island from Mull, there was heard, often during the night, the shout of some one calling for medical assistance to be sent to the sick. There was frequent coming and going of visitors, some being from Ireland, bringing news of the monasteries and old friends there, others being perfect strangers, come to ask the advice and blessing of the saint, or wanting shelter during a storm in the course of their voyaging. And for all there was a kindly welcome and generous hospitality, the monks themselves being allowed more ample fare than usual when a guest was being entertained.

All this, and much more, is told by Adamnan. His book is a kind of Odyssey, so full is it of the salt tang of the sea, and of the spirit of comradeship and bold adventure. Very interesting is the account it gives of the three voyages of Columba's friend Cormac in search of a suitable island on which to found a monastery. Cormac and his men, we are told, ventured " beyond the bounds of human discovery," and passed through the gravest perils. On one of their voyages they touched

at the Orkneys, whereof the inhabitants were still apparently pagans. On Cormac's safe return on each occasion to Iona, there was much joy and thanksgiving at the monastery; and we can imagine what eager interest would be taken in his story, and in hearing what were the prospects, so far as he could see, for the extension of the kingdom of God and of his Christ in the far-off places to which he had been.

But even more remarkable than the general human interest of the book is the beautiful religious spirit that pervades it like an atmosphere. It is fragrant with the love of God and mankind, and with the reverence and affection in which the saint was remembered. And it is the memory of him that has made the little western isle one of the holy places of the world. Dr. Samuel Johnson visited Iona in the autumn of 1773, and his words about it are still the fittest that have been spoken. "We were now treading that illustrious island which was once the luminary of Caledonian religions, whence savage clans and roving barbarians derived the benefits of knowledge and the blessings of religion. To abstract the mind from all local emotion would be impossible, if it were endeavoured, and would be foolish if it were possible. Whatever withdraws us from the power of the senses; whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings. Far from me and from my friends, be such frigid philosophy as may conduct us indifferent and unmoved over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery or virtue. That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona!"

III

ST. BERNARD'S *LETTERS*

AMONG the most precious writings that have come down to us from the past are some which are in the form of letters. A large part of the New Testament consists of writings of this kind.

St. Paul in some of his letters deals with matters of immediate and personal interest to himself and his readers ; in others, which are in fact treatises in epistolary form, he rises to the height of great arguments, and seeks to justify the ways of God and the faith of Christ to men.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux is separated from St. Paul by the lapse of eleven hundred years, and the conditions of his life were very different from those of the Apostle. But he had St. Paul's vivid interests and sympathies and ardent temperament, and his letters, like St. Paul's, were "weighty and strong." As in the case of Paul too, some of Bernard's letters developed into treatises and were published as such.

Bernard was born at his father's castle near Dijon in the year 1091. He was a boy of five when the First Crusade took place at the instance of the bare-footed monk, Peter the Hermit ; and as he grew up the crusading movement became one of the dominant interests of his life. At the age of 23 he entered the monastery of Cîteaux, taking with him about thirty of his com-

panions, including his own brothers, whom he had inspired with something of his own enthusiasm for the monastic ideal. Two years later he was made an Abbot, and was sent forth with a band of monks to found a new monastery of the same strict and laborious Cistercian order. This, after the greatest hardship, he succeeded in doing at Clairvaux, which henceforth became the centre of his amazing activities. Attracted by his personality, many joined the monastery. He lived to see one of his monks on the papal throne, six others appointed cardinals, and over thirty chosen as bishops in various parts of Christendom ; and he himself became the most outstanding figure in the life of his time, directing the conduct of popes and princes from his monastic cell. "By a vow of poverty and penance," says Gibbon, "by closing his eyes against the visible world, by the refusal of all ecclesiastical dignities, the Abbot of Clairvaux became the oracle of Europe and the founder of one hundred and sixty convents."

Bernard first came into prominence in connection with the controversy about the papal succession. After the death of Pope Honorius II in 1130, two rival popes were elected at Rome within a few hours of each other, and the dispute as to which of them was the rightful occupant of the chair of St. Peter lasted for eight years. Largely through the efforts of Bernard the claims of Innocent II were finally acknowledged. Later, Bernard drew upon himself the eyes of all Christendom, and the blessings of all orthodox Christians, by putting to confusion the redoubtable Abelard. Later still, he took up the role of Peter the Hermit and preached the Second Crusade, rousing immense enthusiasm by his

word and presence wherever he went. But that Crusade ended in dismal and distressing failure, and he never got over the grief and disappointment which its failure caused him. He died in 1153, in his sixty-fourth year.

But Bernard's title to the veneration of Christendom does not rest on the conspicuous part he played in deciding the papal succession, which might as well perhaps have been decided differently; nor on his victory over Abelard, which was more apparent than real; nor on being the moving spirit of the Second Crusade, which ended so disastrously. It rests rather on his writings—his sermons, hymns and letters. In them there are some accents of the Holy Ghost that the world has not lost, nor is likely to lose.

It seems somewhat strange that Bernard, who was the most active man of his time, should have come to be looked upon as the type of the contemplative life. It is as such that he appears in the *Paradiso* of Dante. After the poet has climbed to the ninth heaven, Beatrice, who had been his guide thus far, had left him in order to take her place in the Rose of Paradise; and when he turns round he finds that instead of her St. Bernard is now at his side. And Dante recalls with what intense interest he looked on the saint, comparing himself to some one who has come from far to see a famous Veronica—a true likeness of Christ—and who gazing upon it exclaims "My Lord Jesus Christ, true God, and was this, then, the fashion of thy semblance?"

"Such was I, gazing upon the living love of him who in this world by contemplation tasted of that peace."¹

¹ *Canto XXXI*, Wicksteed's translation.

To know the spirit of the Middle Ages in its highest expressions, it is necessary to study the writings of Bernard. He is one of the main sources of thought and inspiration on which Thomas Aquinas and Dante and Thomas à Kempis drew. This is notably the case as regards his teaching about divine love, a subject which he made his own. In his sermons on the Song of Songs, he developed the theme of the Bridegroom and the Bride, Christ and the Church. His best known treatise is on the love of God (*De diligendo Deo*). His most famous hymn, *Jesu, dulcis memoria*, is a true spiritual love song, made familiar to us in the beautiful rendering of Edward Caswall :

Jesu, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast :
But sweeter far thy face to see,
And in thy presence rest.

O hope of every contrite heart,
O joy of all the meek !
To those who fall, how kind thou art !
How good to those who seek !

But what to those who find ? Ah ! this
Nor tongue nor pen can show ;
The love of Jesus ! What it is
None but his loved ones know.

There is necessarily a great deal in mediaevalism and even in the noblest of mediaeval teachers, that is alien to our ways of thought. The monastery, for example, does not represent for us the ideal of the Christian community, but it stood for that in the Middle Ages.

In Bernard's day and for many a day before and after much of the best life of Christendom flowed through the cloisters, and in them the work of civilization as well as Christianization was chiefly carried on. There were, of course, differences in the monastic orders, some being rich and others poor, some rigorous in their discipline, and others accommodating themselves more easily to human frailty. And the human nature that filled them was like what human nature still is : beset by the same temptations to self-indulgence and worldliness, sensitive to the same experiences of joy and sorrow. It was as the spiritual guide of those who had vowed obedience to their highest vision of duty, and were striving to be faithful to it, that Bernard's best work was done ; and he did it largely through his letters.

The Cistercian order was based on the strictest interpretation of the Rule of St. Benedict. But not every one who entered Clairvaux proved fit to stand the severe test of its discipline, and great was the Abbot's grief when such an one left the monastery for another where the conditions were easier, or went back into " the world." Among the companions who had entered Cîteaux with him, and had afterwards accompanied him to Clairvaux, was his young cousin Robert. But Robert, after a while, moved by his own desire for greater comfort and by the persuasions of friends, left Clairvaux and made his way to the luxurious monastery at Cluny, into which he was received. The letter which Bernard sent after him, pleading with him to return, reveals some of the qualities of mind and heart which made him so true a father in God. He bids the youth ask his own conscience why he has gone.

“ Why didst thou desert thine order, thy brethren, thy place and me ; me who am near to thee in blood and still nearer in spirit ? . . . Though thou hast many teachers in Christ, thou hast not many fathers. For both by my word and by my example have I begotten thee to religion. For what good to thee, or for what need of thine, have our friends endeavoured to do this ? For I confess that they have taken not the bone of my bone, nor the flesh of my flesh, but the joy of my heart, the fruit of my spirit, the crown of my hope, and, as I verily believe, the half of my soul. Is thy salvation likely to be advanced by fineness of dress or abundance of dainties ? If such things make a saint, why should I not follow thy example ? But these are the comforts of invalids, not the weapons of fighting men. Rise, soldier of Christ, shake off the dust, return to the battle whence thou hast fled. Contending more bravely after thy flight, thou shalt conquer the more gloriously. Christ hath indeed many soldiers who have begun most bravely, stood fast and overcome, but few who, having taken flight, have turned back again and faced anew the danger from which they shrank, and have put to flight the foe from whom they fled. And because every rare thing is precious, I rejoice that thou shouldst be of those who shall appear more glorious the rarer they are. Woe to thee if, declining the fight, thou lovest at once the victory and the crown ! Which loss may God avert from thee, my dearest son.”

Bernard's advice was much sought, and many of his letters are in reply to requests for counsel and guidance. Naturally he found it difficult at times to know what to say ; but even when his judgement was in suspense

in regard to the particular matter at issue, he managed to indicate the principles on which his correspondent would best be able to settle the question for himself. His letter to Bruno, Archbishop-elect of Cologne, shows his wisdom in dealing with such a case. "You seek counsel from me, most illustrious Bruno," he writes, "as to whether you ought to accept the episcopate, to which it is desired to advance you. What mortal can presume to decide this for you?" Bruno had mentioned that his hesitation in accepting the position was due largely to his consciousness that his character and his past life were not such as fitted him for the office. And Bernard agrees that there is reason for misgiving on that account. On the other hand, he says, Bruno is justified in fearing lest his sense of unworthiness should prevent him from making good use of the talent committed to him. It is unfortunate, Bernard thinks, that there is not time for prolonged penitence and self-scrutiny before the decision has to be made; but he recalls the story of the dying thief on the cross and other Gospel stories which show how the grace of God can accomplish great moral and spiritual changes in a very brief time, and he suggests that what happened in those cases may happen also in the case of an archbishop-elect. He remembers, too, how some men were chosen for apostleship out of occupations and ways of life far removed from such a sacred office—as Matthew from the receipt of customs, Paul from persecuting the Christians. Still, he suggests, these cases are to be regarded rather as marvels than as examples or as offering any help towards rightly deciding the question as to whether Bruno should accept the episcopate. So Bernard

concludes: "Let these provisional replies to your questions suffice. If I do not express a decisive opinion, it is because I do not feel assured. . . . Yet there is one thing I can do for a friend without danger, and with the assurance of a good result, and that is to offer to God my petition that he will assist you in the matter. Leaving therefore to him the secret of his providence I will beg him with humble prayer and earnest supplication that he will work in you and with respect to you that which shall be for his glory and at the same time for your good."

A letter of a different kind is the one addressed to Rainald, the young Abbot of Foynty, who had written to Bernard complaining that his post was a very hard one, that many of the brethren in the monastery were extremely troublesome, that he was sorry he had ever undertaken the charge, and would be glad to be relieved of it, and much else to that effect. And how does Bernard reply? Pending an enquiry as to whether a change was desirable in the interests of the monastery and of Rainald himself, he reminds the young Abbot that he had warned him, before taking up the position, that he would not find it an easy one; and he goes on to say that it is the special duty of an Abbot to be patient with the troublesome brethren under his charge.

"Those who are in health do not need to be borne with, and are not, therefore, a burden. Whomsoever, then, of your brethren you shall find sad, mean-spirited, discontented, remember well that it is for these and for their sake that you are abbot and father. In consoling, in exhorting, in reproofing, you do your duty, you bear your burden; and those whom you bear in order to

cure, you will cure by bearing. But if any one is in such spiritual health that he rather helps you than is helped by you, recognise that to him you are not father and abbot, but equal and friend. You were sent to sustain and console others because you are spiritually stronger and better able to bear than they, and because with the grace of God you are able to sustain all without needing yourself to be aided and sustained by any. . . . Knowing, then, that you were sent to help, not to be helped, remember that you are the vicar of him who came not to be ministered unto but to minister."

To another young abbot (Baldwin of Rieti) who had complained of his insufficiency for the task assigned him, Bernard wrote :

"The letter which you have sent is fragrant with your affection. It arouseth mine. . . . As a mother loveth her only son, so did I love you, when you were close at my side, delighting my heart. . . . Take care to be found a faithful and prudent servant. . . . Do not make unmeaning excuses, as if by reason of your newness in your work, or of your inexperience. . . . Attend to your duty. Rid yourself of shyness by the thought of your office. Behave as a teacher should. Prepare to act in accordance with the one talent confided to you, without care for aught else. If you have received much, give much ; but if little, give that little. For who in the least is not faithful will not be so in the greatest. Remember also to give to your voice the note of valour. 'What is that?' do you ask? Let your deeds harmonise with your words, or rather your words with your deeds ; so that your care may be to act rather than to teach. It is a most beautiful and salutary

rule of life, that the burden which you lay on others you should first bear yourself. Thus by self-control you may learn to control others. Therefore, on these two commands—as to speech and as to example—understand that there depend the highest efficiency of your office and the freedom of your conscience from care. Still if you are wise you will add also a third, zeal in prayer. . . . Thus there abideth these three—speech, example, prayer, but the greatest of these is prayer. For although, as I have said, the valour of speech is manifested in action, yet prayer imparteth grace and efficacy to both action and speech.”

As a rule Bernard found much happiness in his correspondence, regarding it as one of the chief means of fulfilling his ministry of truth and love ; but naturally there were times in the course of his “ busy days and short nights,” when he wished that his friends, if they had nothing very urgent to say, would spare themselves the trouble of saying it and him the trouble of replying. Thus he writes to one (Oger, the Canon) :

“ What need have true and lasting friendships of exchanging empty and fugitive words ? . . . I feel more certain of your affection than I do that you have succeeded in expressing it, and you will not be wrong if you think the same in respect to me. When your letter came into my hands you were present in my heart, and I am quite convinced that it will be the same for me when you receive my letter, and that when you read it I shall not be absent. It is labour to each of us to scribble to the other, and for our messengers a fatigue to carry our letters from the one to the other ; but the heart feels neither labour nor fatigue in loving. Let those things

cease, then, which without labour cannot be carried on, and let us practice only that which, the more earnestly it is done, seems to cost the less labour. Let our minds, I say, rest from dictating, our lips from conversing, our fingers from writing, our messengers from running to and fro. But let not our hearts rest from meditating day and night on the law of the Lord, which is the law of love. The more we cease to be occupied in doing this, the less quiet shall we enjoy ; and the more engrossed we are in it, so much the more calm and repose we shall feel from it. Let us love and be loved, striving to benefit ourselves in the other, and the other in ourselves. For those whom we love, on those do we rely, as those who love us rely in turn on us. Thus to love God is to love charity, and therefore it is to labour for charity, to strive to be loved for the sake of God."

The transition from the private letter to the treatise meant for general circulation was a very easy and natural one. A book could do the work of many letters. Dr. Edmund Gardner speaks of St. Bernard's " Book on the Love of God " (*De diligendo Deo*) as " the simplest book of mediaeval mysticism." Perhaps its simplicity is due to some extent to the fact that it was intended originally as a letter ; and indeed a large part of it is included in one of Bernard's letters—that written to Guignes about the year 1125. His treatment of the subject had a profound influence on later mediaeval thought. It is easy to see, for example, how Bernard's teaching lies behind the beautiful passage in the *Paradiso* in which Piccarda, in reply to Dante's question as to her being content to remain in the lower circles of heaven, says :

"Brother, the quality of love stilleth our will, and maketh us long only for what we have, and giveth us no other thirst.

"Did we desire to be more aloft, our longings were discordant from his will who here assorteth us, and for that, thou wilt see, there is no room within these circles, if of necessity we have our being here in love, and if you think again what is love's nature.

"Nay, 'tis the essence of this blessed being to hold ourselves within the divine will, whereby our own wills are themselves made one.

"So that our being thus, from threshold unto threshold throughout the realm, is a joy to all the realm as to the king, who draweth our wills to what he willeth ;

"And his will is our peace ; it is that sea to which all moves that it createth and nature maketh.

"Clear was it then to me how everywhere in heaven is Paradise, e'en though the grace of the chief good doth not rain there after one only fashion."¹

Bernard's book on loving God was written in reply to some one who had asked him why, and in what measure, God is to be loved. "The reason for loving God," he answers briefly, "is God, and he is to be loved without measure." In the course of the treatise this answer is explained and elaborated. God is to be loved both because of the material things he gives to men—bread and sun and air, and of the varied provision he makes for their spiritual life and wellbeing. He has moreover endowed men with worth and knowledge and virtue. These endowments are the stamp of his image

¹ *Canto, III.* Wicksteed's translation.

in their souls ; and it is because of this divine image or ideal within them that they can never truly rest in anything less than himself, however much they try. In their wilfulness they are ever trying one thing after another outside of him, and always failing to find the peace they crave. " And if," says Bernard, " their utmost longing were realised, so that they should have all the world for their own, yet without possessing him who is the author of all being, then the same law of their desire would make them condemn what they had, and restlessly seek him whom they still lacked, that is God himself. Rest is in him alone."

Several chapters of the book are devoted to what Bernard calls the four degrees of love. The first is that in which a man loves himself alone and for his own sake ; the second, that in which he loves God for the sake of the benefits he receives and expects from God ; the third that in which he loves God for the sake of God, that is for what God is in himself, in his infinite loveliness and perfection ; and the fourth and highest degree is that in which he loves himself for God's sake.

" To reach this state is to become Godlike. As a drop of water, poured into wine, loses itself, and takes the colour and savour of wine ; or as a bar of iron, heated red-hot, becomes like fire itself, forgetting its own substance ; or as the air, radiant with sunbeams, seems not so much to be illuminated as to be light itself ; so, in the saints, all human affections melt away, as by an unspeakable transmutation, into the will of God. For how could God be all in all, if anything merely human remained in man ? The substance will endure, but in another beauty, a higher power, a greater glory." (x.)

Bernard pictures the souls of the blessed in heaven as so absorbed in the love of God, and so full of the joy they have in the contemplation of it, as to be untroubled by pity for the lost who are suffering the torments of hell. It is an indication perhaps of the strength of Bernard's human affections that he makes pity an impossible emotion in heaven. Like all mediaeval Christians he believed implicitly in hell ; but the thought of those who were condemned to everlasting misery there so distressed his soul, that he could not imagine himself enjoying a state of bliss if he still retained any feeling of pity for the lost. So he concludes his book by saying : " Assuredly where there shall be no place for misery or time for mercy, there can be no feeling of compassion." It was not given even to the greatest of mediaeval saints to realise the depth and fulness of the Everlasting Mercy ; it was not given to him to know that as long as there is a lost soul there will be a Divine Love going forth to seek and to save it.

Bernard's treatise *On Consideration* is a long letter addressed to Pope Eugenius III, who had been one of his monks at Clairvaux, and had been raised to the papacy largely through his influence. In it he discusses the highest questions of theology, as well as sets forth the duties of the papal office itself. He seeks to impress upon the pope the duty of so ordering his life as to free himself from all unnecessary burdens and distractions, and thus be enabled to discharge his special responsibilities with the utmost diligence and fidelity. No doubt it is a book with which Eugenius' successors from that time to this have made themselves familiar, and there is certainly much in it that ministers of God of all ranks

and denominations might well read, mark and learn. Here is the kind of advice which Bernard gives :

“ Consider before all things the Holy Roman Church, over which by the authority of God thou presidest, to be the mother of the Churches, not their mistress. Look upon thyself not as the lord of the bishops, but as one of them ; moreover think of thyself as the brother of those who love God, and as a partaker with them that fear him. Consider also that thou oughtest to be a model of uprightness, a mirror of holiness, an example of piety, the assertor of truth, the defender of the faith, the teacher of nations, the leader of Christians, the friend of the bridegroom, the leader of her spouse to the bride, the ordainer of the clergy, the shepherd of the people, the refuge of the oppressed, the advocate of the poor, the hope of the wretched, the guardian of the fatherless, the renderer of justice to the widow, the eye of the blind, the tongue of the dumb, the staff of the old, the avenger of crimes, the fear of the malignant, the glory of the good, a rod for the powerful, a hammer for tyrants, the father of kings, the moderator of laws, the dispenser of canons, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the priest of the most high, the vicar of Christ, the anointed of the Lord. Understand what I say ; the Lord will give thee understanding. When power is joined to wickedness, thou must be presumed to be something more than man. Thy face must be upon them that do evil. Let him who feareth not man, who dreadeth not the sword, fear the breath of thy wrath. Let him who despised thine admonition, fear thy prayer.” (Chap. vii.)

IV

JOHN TAULER'S *SERMONS*

IN our time there has been a revival of interest in mysticism. It is largely due to the influence of the new psychology which has turned attention to the innermost and deepest region of the mind. The plea which William James and his school made for faith in the instinctive movements of the human spirit is in accord with the teaching of the mystic, who has always maintained that it is under such guidance, rather than by means of the senses and the reasoning faculties, that man is brought into closest relation with ultimate truth and good.

Mysticism is an old thing in Christendom and in the world. Not to know anything about it is, according to Royce, not to know anything about a large part of human nature. "It has," he says, "been the ferment of the faiths, the forerunner of spiritual liberty, the inaccessible refuge of the nobler heretics, the inspirer, through poetry, of countless youths who know no metaphysics, the teacher, through the devotional books, of the despairing, the comforter of those who are weary of finitude; it has determined directly or indirectly, more than half of the technical theology of the Church."¹

Mysticism is an essential element in all religion that is properly so called; it is indeed, as Edward Caird said,

¹ *The World and the Individual*, i. p. 85.

“religion in its most concentrated and exclusive form ; it is the attitude of the mind in which all relations are swallowed up in the relation of the soul of God.” It arises oftenest as a reaction against over-attention to what Richard Baxter called the “circumstantial of religion,” that is, against ceremonialism, dogmatism, and formalism generally ; but it arises also as a revolt of the soul against the crowding out of religion by other interests, duties, business and pleasure. The mystic has stood forth on behalf of God and the soul. He has insisted that the claims of these cannot, except at our peril, be pushed aside or subordinated to anything else ; that only in so far as the love of God moves and inspires us and regulates our activities, do we attain inward peace and fulfil the great ends of our being. Religion, for the mystic, is nothing if it is not dominating, all-pervasive, and worth the sacrifice of every other interest and affection. For him it is the direct communion of the soul with God ; in the words of Plotinus, it is “a flight from the alone to the Alone.” Like revolts generally, mysticism has often gone to extremes. In declaiming against formalism, it has sometimes assumed that forms had no value or importance whatever ; in protesting against the submerging of religion by other interests it has sometimes forgotten that these have a legitimate place in the Divine plan of our lives. Still, despite the extremes to which it has gone, mysticism has been a most wholesome influence throughout the centuries. It has been the quickening spirit in Christendom, the cause of all genuine revivals. A Church lives by the mysticism that is in it, by its sense of the invisible and eternal.

Mysticism, again, has sought to recall men to a sense of the unity that underlies all the diversity of existence. It has opposed the tendency to think in terms of the particular rather than of the universal, to see things in their separateness rather than in their union, to be so engrossed with the phenomenal world as to be forgetful of its substance and cause. "We seem," says Edward Caird, "to move from one thing to another, while the all-encompassing circle, within which all objects and interests are comprehended, can hardly be said to exist for us. Our thoughts rest on difference as the primary fact—on the difference of one thing from another, and of the self from the not self—and, if the unity be recognised at all, it is as a unity of external relation or synthesis. It is a great step in advance, nay it is like the rending of the veil under which the meaning of life is hid, when it is realised that all the differences of our consciousness presuppose its unity. . . . Mysticism, as it is expressed by Plotinus, represents the first overpowering realisation of this idea, in which no place, or at least no logical place, is left for any other thought. We can, therefore, understand how it is that he dwells so much upon the conception that the one is always with us and within us, though we seldom realise its nearness. But just because we do not realise this, our life, he contends, is disorganised and at discord with itself, or rather with a principle in it which is deeper even than self. We look outward instead of inward, and we look inward instead of upward. Our first is that which ought to be last, and our last is that which ought to be first."¹

What Caird says of the mysticism of Plotinus, the

¹ *The Evolution of Theology in Greek Philosophers*, ii. pp. 222-3.

founder of neo-Platonism, is true of mysticism generally and it is illustrated by the great mystical movement which arose in Germany in the fourteenth century. The movement is associated chiefly with Strasburg and Cologne and other cities in the region of the Rhine. Its founder was Meister Eckhart, and its best literary expression is in the *Sermons* of John Tauler and in the anonymous work which has sometimes, but apparently without sufficient reason, been ascribed to him, the *Theologia Germanica*. Both Eckhart and Tauler were Dominican friars, and it is not unlikely that their teaching was in part a reaction against the somewhat arid scholasticism which had established itself within that order. At any rate, there was room for a movement that made a direct appeal to the soul, and which found God immediately through intuition and the faith that worketh by love, rather than at the end of a process of reasoning, or as an inference from data supplied by the senses.

Tauler was born at Strasburg. There is uncertainty as to the date of his birth, but it was probably about 1300. In his boyhood he became a novice in the Dominican convent in his native city, and he remained there for ten years. At the end of that time he was sent for further study to Cologne, where he spent four years. It used to be thought that he had studied also at Paris, but that does not seem to have been the case. Paris was then the seat of the scholastic philosophy; and from one of his sermons we gather that Tauler did not feel drawn to that kind of teaching. "Great doctors of Paris," he says, "read ponderous books, and turn over many pages. The Friends of God read the living Book

where everything is life." In those years of study, however, he seems to have become deeply read in the writings of Augustine, of the pseudo-Dionysius, and of Bernard ; but the greatest influence upon him was that of Eckhart, to whose sermons and lectures he probably listened both at Strasburg and at Cologne. Eckhart's teaching was arousing great popular interest, and arousing too in some quarters the suspicion of heresy, on which account it—or rather some of it—was condemned by the ecclesiastical authorities two years after his death. For the charge of pantheism that was brought against Eckhart, there seems to have been real ground ; and pantheism is a form of religious philosophy with which mysticism, with its insistence on the unity of things, has a strong affinity. "God," says Eckhart, "has the substance of all things in himself." "All things are in God, and all things are God." And here are some other characteristic sayings of his : "Consciously or unconsciously all things seek their proper place. The stone cannot cease moving till it touch the earth ; the fire rises up to heaven ; thus a loving soul can never rest but in God ; and so we may say God has given to all things their proper place—to the fish the water, to the bird the air, to the soul the Godhead." "Simple souls conceive that we are to see God, as if he stood on that side and we on this. It is not so ; God and I are one in the act of my perceiving him." "If the soul is to know God, it must forget itself and lose itself, for as long as it contemplates itself it cannot contemplate God. When it has lost itself and everything in God ; when it attains to the knowledge of him, it finds also everything which it had abandoned complete in

God.”¹ “The divine light permeates the soul, and lifts it above the turmoil of temporal things to rest in God. . . . Love works the likeness of God into the soul. The peace, freedom and blessedness of all souls consist in their abiding in God’s will. Towards this union with God for which it was created the soul strives perpetually.”²

Such was the kind of teaching that met with an enthusiastic response in the mind and heart of John Tauler ; and it strikes the keynote of his own mystical doctrine. If we assume that he was born in 1300, he would be about 30 when Meister Eckhart died. He became a great preacher, drawing crowds of eager listeners, and became the leader of those who called themselves the Friends of God—a large and loosely organised society of priests and laity, who had been influenced by Eckhart and whose religion was one of union with God, and with all who seek to do God’s will.

There is much true liberalism of thought in the literature of these Friends of God, though they were all loyal Catholics. Thus in one of their publications, *The Book of the Nine Rocks*, we read : “If a Jew or a Moham-medan fears God from the depths of his heart, and leads a good and simple life ; if he does not know any better religion than the one in which he was born ; if he is ready to obey God in case He reveals a better faith than his own, why should not such an one be dearer to God than wicked and impious ‘Christians’ who, though they have received baptism, wilfully disobey the commands

¹ Sermon on “The Nearness of the Kingdom.”

² Sermon on “Outward and Inward Morality.”

of God ? When God finds a good Jew or Mohammedan of pure life he feels a thrill of love and infinite pity for him, no matter in what part of the earth he lives, and God will find some way of saving him unknown to us. . . . If baptism cannot be conferred upon him, though he has a desire for it, God can baptise him in the holy desire of his will, and there are in the eternal world many good pagans who have been received in this way." Such sentiments would be remarkable in almost any Christian century ; and they show how deeply the religion of those fourteenth century Friends of God was rooted and grounded in love, and how truly it was a religion of the spirit. The movement found its most exquisite literary expression in the book called the *Theologia Germanica*. The great saying of its unknown author, " I would fain be to the Eternal Goodness what his own hand is to a man " has been the motto of many a noble life. The book gave fresh utterance to St. Bernard's doctrine that our love of God must be a pure disinterested love. It does not set self-realisation as the chief end of existence. " So long," it says, " as a man seeketh his own will and his own highest good, because it is his and for his own sake, he will never find it. For so long as he doeth this, he is seeking himself, and dreameth that he is himself the highest good. But whoever seeketh, loveth, and pursueth goodness as goodness and for the sake of goodness, not for the love of the I, me, mine, self, and the like, he will find the highest good, for he seeketh it aright." (Chapter xlv.) The quality of the *Theologia Germanica*, and the spirit that animated the Friends of God, may be further illustrated by this passage :

" Wherever a man hath been made a partaker of the

divine nature, in him is fulfilled the best and noblest life and the worthiest in God's eyes. And of that eternal love which loveth goodness as goodness and for the sake of goodness, a true noble Christ-like life is so greatly beloved, that it will never be forsaken or cast off. Where a man has tasted this life, it is impossible for him ever to part with it, were he to live until the judgment day. . . . This is one answer to the question, ' If a man, by putting on Christ's life, can get nothing more than he hath already and serve no end, what good will it do him ? ' This life is not chosen to serve any end, or to get anything by it, but for love of its nobleness, and because God loveth and esteemeth it so greatly. And whoever saith that he hath had enough of it, and may now lay it aside, hath never tasted nor known it ; for he who hath truly felt or tasted it can never give it up again. And he who hath put on the life of Christ with the intent to win or deserve ought thereby, hath taken it up as an hireling, and not for love, and is altogether without it. For he who doth not take it up for love, hath none of it at all ; he may dream indeed that he hath put it on, but he is deceived. Christ did not live such a life as his for the sake of reward, but out of love ; and love maketh such a life light and taketh away all its hardships ; so that it becometh sweet and is gladly endured. But to him that hath not put it on from love, but hath done so, as he dreameth, for the sake of reward, it is utterly bitter and a weariness, and he would fain be quit of it. And it is a sure token of an hireling, that he wisheth his work were at an end. But he who truly loveth it, is not offended at its toil nor the length of time it lasteth. Therefore it is written : ' To serve God

and live to him, is easy to him who doeth it.' Truly it is so to him who doeth it from love, but it is hard and wearisome to him who doeth it for hire. It is the same with all virtue and good works, and likewise with order, laws, obedience, precepts, and the like. But God rejoiceth more over one man who truly loveth than over a thousand hirelings." (Chapter xxxviii.)

One of the Friends of God, who is specially interesting because of his influence upon Gerard Groot, the founder of the Brotherhood of the Common Life, to which Thomas à Kempis belonged, is John Ruysbroek, properly John of Ruysbroek, who was born in 1293 in the village near Brussels after which he was called. He was a man of original genius, though, we are told, of little education. As a recluse in the abbey of Grönendal in the forest of Soignes he exercised a great influence both personally and through his writings. Many resorted to him for counsel in their spiritual perplexities. There is a story of some priests coming to him from Paris to consult him about the state of their souls, and the only answer he would give them was, "You are just as holy as you desire to be." When they showed some annoyance at receiving such an answer, he continued, "I said that your holiness was that which you desired it to be ; in other words, it is in proportion to your goodwill. Enter into yourselves, examine your goodwill, and you will have the measure of your state."

To the literature of the Friends of God belong also the writings of Henry Suso (1295-1365), who, like Tauler, was a Dominican. After studying under Eckhart at Cologne, he returned to the monastery at Constance where he had received his earlier training, and where

by and by he became Prior. In his autobiography he relates how, one day, soon after he became a monk, he was crossing the Lake of Constance, and beside him in the boat there sat a young knight who told him that he was on his way to arrange a tournament in which many were to take part. "And what is the prize?" asked Suso. "A gold ring," was the answer, "and," added the knight, "it will be won by him who best bears wounds and bruises and who holds out the longest." Then said Suso within himself, "How much these men are willing to risk and endure for a prize so trifling! Oh to be a knight of God!" And so he came to think of his life in terms of chivalry, as a tourneying for the Lord, in which he must fight manfully and bear cheerfully whatever blows were dealt him. There is a breath of true poetry in his writings, and a fine feeling for nature. "Let us pause here awhile," he says, "and reflect upon the high and venerable Master as mirrored in his works. Look above thee and around thee . . . and see how wide and high the beautiful heaven is in its swift course, and how nobly its Master has adorned it with the seven planets, and how he has decked it with the countless multitude of bright stars. Oh, when in summer time the beautiful sun bursts forth unclouded and serene, what fruitfulness and blessings it bestows unceasingly on the earth! See how the leaves and grass shoot up, and the lovely flowers smile; how forest, heath, and meadow ring again with the sweet song of nightingales and other little birds; how all those little creatures, which stern nature had shut up, issue forth rejoicing, and pair together; and how mankind, too, both old and young, rejoice and make merry. Oh, gentle God, if thou

art so lovely in thy creatures, how lovely and blessed must thou be in Thyself ! ”¹

One distinguishing feature of the teaching of the Friends of God was its insistence on the idea that the highest life is open to men of every calling and not merely to those who had taken the monastic vows. In this respect it anticipated the teaching of the Reformers, with their doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. By the mediaeval mind generally saintliness was regarded as a career that could only be followed by withdrawing from the common relationships of home and business, and by devoting oneself to the life of prayer and self-discipline and thought on sacred things. Even when the monastic orders were missionary in their character—as was the case with the Franciscan and the Dominican—the path of holiness was still the same ; the “ religious ” life was considered incompatible with life “ in the world.” Saintliness was a profession, and was to be entered only through the renunciation of property and all domestic ties, and through the complete surrender of the will to ecclesiastical authority. The tradesman might, by the grace of God and the uprightness of his life, and the faithful use of the means and opportunities of spiritual culture, attain his salvation ; but he was made to feel that there were heights in the Christian life which he need never hope to reach, and that the least among those who had taken the monastic vows and kept them was greater than he. It was not supposed, of course, that the mere keeping of the vows made men saints ; there was always evidence enough to the contrary ; but nevertheless, that was the door through which the saintly life was entered

¹ *The Life of Henry Suso* by himself, chap. LIV.

if it was entered at all. Dean Inge has said that "the professional saint almost disappeared from northern Europe at or before the Reformation." His disappearance is largely due to the teaching of the Friends of God, and especially to that of John Tauler.

Tauler's teaching in this respect was based on his conviction of the divinity of every human soul. That each soul bears the image of God is a truth which he asserts again and again. Thus in preaching on the text "Whose image and superscription is this?" he says that God impressed his image and superscription on our souls when he created them; and so, while we should render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, we ought to render to God the soul which bears his image, and should never debase this divine currency by making it serve unworthy ends. He illustrates the same truth in another striking way. "As a sculptor is said to have exclaimed on seeing a rude block of marble, 'What a godlike beauty thou hidest!' so God looks upon man in whom his own image is hidden." This divine image is the most central and essential thing in man; and to have it clear of all that obscures and disfigures it, is the great task of his life, in accomplishing which he regains his lost unity with God. "When" says Tauler, "through all manner of exercises, the outward man has been converted into the inward, reasonable man, the powers of the senses and of the reason are gathered into the very centre of man's being—the unseen depths of the spirit, wherein lies the image of God—and thus he flings himself into the Divine Abyss in which he dwelt eternally before he was created; then when God finds the man thus simply and nakedly turned

towards him, the Godhead bends down and descends into the depths of the pure, waiting soul, and transforms the created soul, drawing it up into the uncreated essence, so that the spirit becomes one with him." (Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.)

According to Tauler, nothing is so near the soul as God. Into the Divine Abyss of love and goodness that encompasses it, the soul may throw itself at any moment by means of holy desire, and through such experience be purified and ennobled. And the good effects of that experience persist in spite of all subsequent failure and backsliding. It is better to have loved God and lost him than never to have loved him at all ; it is better to have heard his word and forgotten it or but imperfectly obeyed it, than never to have listened to it.

" Dear children, ye ought not to cease from hearing or declaring the word of God, because ye do not always live according to it, nor keep it in mind. For inasmuch as ye love it and crave after it, it will assuredly be given unto you ; and you shall enjoy it for ever with God, according to the measure of your desire after it. Do not relinquish your desire though it be not fulfilled immediately, or though you may swerve from your aspirations, or even forget them for a time. It were a hard case if this were to cut you off for ever from the end of your being. But when ye hear the word of God, surrender yourselves wholly to it as if for eternity with a full purpose of will to retain it in your mind and to order your life according to it ; and let it sink down right deep into your heart as into an eternity. If afterwards it should come to pass that you let it slip, and never think of it again, yet the love and aspiration which once really existed live

forever before God, and in Him ye shall find the fruit thereof ; that is, to all eternity it shall be better for you than if you had never felt them. What we can do is a small thing ; but we can will and aspire to great things. Thus, if a man cannot be great, he can be good in will ; and what he with his whole heart and mind, love and desire, wills to be, that without doubt he most truly is. It is little that we can bring to pass ; but our will and desire may be large. Nay, they may grow till they lose themselves in the infinite abyss of God. Not that we ought to think within ourselves that we wish to be this or that, like such a saint or angel, for we ought to be much more than we can conceive or fathom ; wherefore our part is to give ourselves over wholly to God, and to leave ourselves utterly in His hands, being wholly his. And if ye cannot be as entirely his as ye fain would be, be his as much as ye may attain unto ; but whatever ye are, be that truly and entirely ; and what ye cannot be, that be contented not to be, in a sincere spirit of resignation, for God's sake and in him. So shall you peradventure possess more of God in lacking than in having. Therefore, be God's ; yield to his hand, suffer him to do in thee and to thee, and with thee, what he will ; and then nothing here or hereafter shall be able to confound you." (Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent.)

In saying that we are what in our heart we desire to be, Tauler was but restating the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith—the meaning of which essentially is that God judges us not by our attainment but by our aim ; not by our character or our works, but by the heavenly ideal, the Christ, that is enshrined within our hearts. Tauler in maintaining that the highest life was

open to all alike did not suggest, nor would he have admitted, that the laity were on account of their callings at any disadvantage in their endeavour to live that life. For he held that every calling was, or could be made, a truly religious one, a means of serving God and the community. "One can spin," he says, "another can make shoes, and all these are gifts of the Holy Spirit. I tell you, if I were not a priest, I should esteem it a great gift that I was able to make shoes, and I would try to make them so well as to be a pattern to all." And again he says, "People may shut themselves up in convents, and have their hearts wandering over the world after the things that perish. On the other hand, you may find people at the yearly market in the town, with buying and selling and all sorts of din and noise all round them, and yet they have their hearts so shut in with the Lord that nothing disturbs or distracts them. This is the best convent to live in, the blessed convent of communion with God." "I know a man, the dearest perhaps of all the Friends of God. He worked in the fields all his life, more than forty years, and there he is working still." ¹

A few more sentences from a sermon will reveal further the nature of Tauler's teaching or at any rate such of it as appeals most to the mind of to-day; for of course there is a great deal which, both in thought and expression, is of his own fourteenth century, and is of little spiritual help or value to us. In reading the mediaeval mystics generally, we have to take what we can, and try to get behind and beneath the temporary modes of expression, which often repel us, to the essential

¹ *Three Friends of God*, pp. 117, 119, 128.

meaning, which will sometimes surprise us happily by its truth and wisdom.

“ How can we come to perceive the direct leading of God ? By a careful looking at home, and abiding within the gates of thy own soul. Therefore, let a man be at home in his own heart, and cease from his restless chase of and search after outward things. If he is thus at home while on earth, he will surely come to see what there is to do at home—what God commands him inwardly, without means, and also outwardly by the help of means ; and then let him surrender himself, and follow God along whatever path his loving Lord thinks fit to lead him, whether it be to contemplation or action, to usefulness or enjoyment ; whether in sorrow or in joy, let him follow on. And if God do not give him thus to feel his hand in all things, let him still simply yield himself up, and go without for God’s sake, out of love, and still press forward, setting ever before him the lovely example of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. . . . The men who thus tread in his steps do become in very truth the noblest and most glorious of their race ; and those who are thus born again into his life are the rich and costly jewels of the Holy Christian Church, and in all ages they work out the highest good, while they look not to the greatness or meanness of their work, nor to their success or failure, but only to the will of God in all things ; and for this cause all their works are the best that may be. Neither do they look whether God will place them high or low, for the only thing they care for is, that in all things alike God’s will may be done. God grant that it may be thus with each of us. Amen.”
(Sermon for First Sunday in Advent.)

V

THOMAS À KEMPIS' *IMITATION OF CHRIST*

ABOUT the end of the fourteenth century there were living together in the town of Deventer in Holland a number of men who were inspired by the same religious ideal and were seeking to give practical expression to it. They contributed to their mutual support by engaging in various forms of industry, and especially in the copying of manuscripts. Realising themselves the value of sound learning, and spending much of their time in study, they were eager in promoting the education of the young, and they had established, or were helping to maintain, several schools in the neighbourhood, in which poor children were taught free of charge. These men were called "The Brethren of the Common Life." The community had been founded by a remarkable man, Gerard Groot, who had been greatly influenced by the Dutch mystic, John Ruysbroek ; and it was now under the charge of one who had been Gerard's friend and disciple, Florentius Radewyn, a man of fine character and conspicuous ability.

At the door of this community, one day in the year 1392, a boy of twelve presented himself. He had come all the way from Kempen, near Cologne, and he asked that he might see his brother John. But he was told that John, who was fifteen years older than himself, had left Deventer and had become a monk in a new

monastery at Windesheim, fourteen miles further north, which the Brethren had established, and which was the first of many religious houses founded by them. So Thomas, for that was his name, went on to Windesheim. After seeing his brother there, he returned to Deventer, bearing no doubt a letter to Florentius commending him to the care of that wise and kindly man. He had attended school in his native town, and now, through the good offices of Florentius, he was placed for further instruction in the Deventer Grammar School. While he was still a scholar he was able to mingle freely with the Brethren, and he learnt to love them more and more for the kind of life they led and for the beautiful spirit of comradeship there was among them. For Florentius he had a special reverence and affection, and long afterwards he wrote : " I used to go into the choir with the other scholars. . . . Once on a time it happened when I was standing near him in the choir that he turned to share our book for the chanting, and he standing behind me, put his hands upon my shoulder—but I stood still, hardly daring to move, bewildered with gratification at so great an honour."¹ That touch of one so loved and revered had become for the boy a precious and imperishable memory. At school Thomas learnt to write very beautifully and clearly, as is evident from the autograph copy of the *De Imitatione Christi* which is preserved in the Royal Library at Brussels ; and moreover he was very fond of books, never so happy even then than when he was " in angello cum libello," in a little corner with a little book. So when his schooling was at an end and he became first a novice and afterwards a full member

¹ *The Founders of the New Devotion*, p. 104.

of the monastery which the Brethren had set up on Mount St. Agnes, near Zwolle, he was put to the kind of work he liked best—that of copying manuscripts. He had a high opinion of the value of such work, and in a sermon he says: “If he shall not lose his reward who gives a cup of cold water to his thirsty neighbour, what will not be the reward of those who by putting good books into the hands of those neighbours, open to them the fountains of eternal life?”¹ This copying of books was indeed a most important industry, carried on mainly in the quiet cloisters of monasteries. Printing from moveable type was not invented till more than fifty years after Thomas settled at Mount St. Agnes, where he lived till he was over 90.

But Thomas was more than a copyist of the Bible and other good books; he made an original contribution to the religious literature of the world, and it was a contribution of the utmost value and significance. His *Imitation of Christ* has, it is said, been published in more than 3,000 editions, and it has been translated into a multitude of languages. A work of the highest excellence is as rare a thing, and as difficult of achievement, in devotional literature as it is in any other kind of literature; and it is surely as worthy of the closest and most exhaustive study as regards its origin and antecedents, its teaching, and its literary structure.

How was it that the *Imitation* came into being, and what are its main conceptions and its outstanding literary features? And above all, what is it that gives the book its permanent interest and value, that explains the amazing appeal which it has made and continues

¹ Concio XX.

to make to all sorts and conditions of men? These are some of the questions to which I would ask your attention.

Among the things that Gerard Groot had encouraged the Brethren of the Common Life to do was to keep commonplace books in which they could put any fine sayings they came across in the course of their reading, or heard in conversation, or any good thoughts that arose in their own minds. From the fact that the main occupation of the Brethren was the copying of books, the practice of making extracts of passages that particularly impressed them would arise very naturally, and almost inevitably. We can imagine one of them, for instance, transcribing a work of Augustine or Bernard, and when he came upon something that especially struck him, saying to himself, "I must make a note of this, and speak about it to the brethren and others likely to be interested in it." So from a shelf in his cell or scriptorium, he takes a note-book, and in it he enters the passage or saying. Possibly he kept a series of note-books for different subjects. These note-books were called "*rapiaria*," a name that suggests spoil or plunder, things seized in passing.

Now it seems to have been from such *rapiaria*—such collections of things read or heard or thought—that Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* originated. Thomas may have begun with little or no idea of making a book of his own; and probably after the *Imitation* was completed he would have hesitated about claiming it as his own, so much would he feel that he was indebted to others for thought and inspiration. And indeed he did not put his name to the book as its author. At the

end of the autograph manuscript in the Royal Library at Brussels; he does place his name, but only as copyist. Had he been a little less self-effacing, the great controversy that has raged for centuries as to the authorship of the *Imitation* would never have arisen. It may be said of him what has been said of Shakespeare, that he was like a man who has thrown a bag of gold into a house, and gone away without telling the inmates who it was to whom they owed the gift. He had taken as his motto a saying of St. Bernard, "Ama nesciri,"—love to be unknown. Besides he was anxious that the truth of a saying or book should be left to make its own impression, apart altogether from the question as to who said it or wrote it. Truth, he held, should be its own authority; it is not made more true by "the shadow of a great name," or less true by an obscure one. So he says, "Let not the authority of the writer move thee, whether he be of small or great learning; but let the love of pure truth draw thee to read. Ask not who said this or that, but mark what is said." (i. 5.)

Thus, for those who, contrary to Thomas' advice, wish to know who said this or that in the *Imitation*, and to discuss the authorship of the book, there is plenty of scope for research and speculation. There are still those who maintain that it was written by Jean Gerson (1363-1429) who had been Chancellor of the University of Paris, and had in other ways played a great part in the life of his time. They who take this view argue that the book is the result of an experience which could not have been gained by one who had led such a quiet, uneventful life as that of Thomas à Kempis. It is more likely, they say, to be the work of one like Gerson in

whose career great worldly success had been followed by failure, and who had been humbled and chastened by that experience. But given spiritual genius—the seeing eye and the understanding heart—there is nothing surely in the *Imitation* that could not have been written by a monk in the monastery of St. Agnes ; for there, in himself and in those about him, he could study human nature as well as anywhere else, and learn the things that make for inward peace and the upbuilding of Christian character. Indeed in that monastery and in the life of its monks, there was much that was particularly favourable for the production of such a work as the *Imitation*. For, as we have seen, the chief business carried on there was the copying of books. The monastery thus became a kind of clearing house for ideas, in which all the best thought of the past and present was discussed by keenly interested minds.

The sources of many of the sayings in the *Imitation* have been traced, and those of others perhaps will be found. The Bible was naturally Thomas' chief source, and there are few pages in which he does not draw upon it. He quotes frequently from St. Augustine ; and it is evident throughout that the teaching of Augustine had entered into the very fabric of his thought. But indeed it would be difficult to find a mediaeval writer who did not feel the influence of that master mind. Another of Thomas' main sources of inspiration was the writings of St. Bernard. So much affinity has the *Imitation* with these writings, both in thought and expression, that Bernard's authorship of the book was at one time seriously maintained. But although the influence of Bernard is apparent throughout, the amount of direct

or literal quotation does not seem to be very much. Mr. De Montmorency tells us that he read through some of Bernard's works in the Latin, and in doing so made a note of a number of passages which seemed familiar to him, and which he felt sure he would find in the *Imitation*. On searching there for them, however, he failed to discover them. It would appear, then, that although Thomas was indebted to Bernard for ideas, the form he gave to them was nearly always his own.

It is not known whether Thomas had read Dante, but the probability is that he had not, and that such resemblances as there are between the *Imitation* and the *Divine Comedy* are due in some cases to a common indebtedness to Bernard, and, in others, to ideas and beliefs that were widespread throughout the Middle Ages, and of which both Dante and à Kempis make use. Thus it was widely believed, on the authority apparently of an apocryphal work called the Apocalypse of St. Peter, that the punishments in hell would correspond exactly to the nature of the sins ; so we have Dante's Inferno, in which this idea is elaborated and illustrated to the utmost, and we have such a passage in the *Imitation* as this : " There shall the slothful be pricked forward with burning goads, and the glutton be tormented with extreme hunger and thirst ; there shall the luxurious and lovers of pleasures be bathed in burning pitch and stinking brimstone, and the envious, like mad dogs, shall howl for very grief." (I. 24).

The *Imitation* is in some ways very remote from the mysticism of Tauler and the other Friends of God. Thomas' religion is almost entirely that of the cloister. There is an aloofness in his attitude towards the common

life and business of mankind in marked contrast to that of the Friends of God, whose religion was largely a lay religion, a religion of the home and workshop and the market place, regarding all kinds of honest labour as ways of holy living and as means of serving God and mankind. Nevertheless the mysticism of the Friends of God was in Thomas' blood. It is not unlikely that his parents at Kempen had listened to Tauler and shared in the spiritual revival which resulted from Tauler's preaching throughout the region of the Rhine. Mysticism, too, must have been in the air he breathed as one of the Brethren of the Common Life ; for had not their revered founder, Gerard Groot, been influenced by Ruysbroek ? Indeed, would the brotherhood ever have been established but for that influence ? So we should naturally expect the *Imitation* to embody a great deal of the teaching of the mystics ; and some students believe that they find here and there the thought of Tauler and Suso and Ruysbroek reproduced in it. But it is evident that, profound as the influence of these mystics must have been upon him, and much as he must have absorbed their teaching, Thomas' *Imitation* is in no sense or measure to be regarded as a compilation from their writings.

If the book had any "begetter" besides Thomas himself, it was Gerard Groot, who, as we have seen, suggested the keeping of rapiaria by the Brethren. In Thomas' *Life of Gerard Groot*, a number of the latter's sayings are given, and these sayings have the very quality of the *Imitation*—brief, incisive, arresting, full of meaning, and inculcating the same kind of truths as the *Imitation* itself. Here are a few of them.

"He who doeth that which he knoweth, doth deserve to know much. He who doeth not that which he knoweth doth deserve to be in darkness."

"Before all things and in all things study especially to be humble inwardly, and also outwardly before the brethren."

"The beginning of vain glory is to be pleasing to oneself."

"Thou oughtest always to strive to note some good in another, and to think thereof."

"When any evil is suggested to thee, think what thou wouldest ask thy fellows to do in like case."

"Let every man beware of causing scandal to others by his conduct; let him study to amend the same, and everywhere to behave himself honestly, that others may be the more edified."

"With whatsoever thoughts a man doth fall asleep, with such doth he awaken; at these times it is well to pray or read some Psalms."

"The further a man knows himself to be from perfection, the nearer he is to it."

"Study only to please him who doth know thee and all that pertaineth to thee; suppose that thou dost please all men but dost displease God, what should it profit thee?"¹

But even though we assume that it was Gerard Groot to whom we owe the style of writing which Thomas adopted, there is no more reason for supposing that the *Imitation* embodies many of his sayings than for thinking that it incorporates many of the sayings of the mystics and others. The *Imitation* is not a compilation, a book

¹ *Founders of the New Devotion*, pp. 71-2.

of extracts from many sources, cleverly arranged. It is one of the most original books in the world, a work of religious genius of the first order. Like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, like Shakespeare, like all the great masters in literature, Thomas à Kempis was indebted to predecessors who worked in the same fields, and he freely availed himself of the fruits of their labour. He was the heir of many ages of spiritual culture, and he used his inheritance for the enriching and perfecting of the work which God had given him to do. Not in vain had he studied and transcribed the great teachers of Christendom in his quiet corner on Mount St. Agnes. Their teaching had stirred his soul, and mingled with his own thought ; and so, when he came to write, he could hear, as it were, the sound of many potent voices from the past bearing witness to the truth he had himself to deliver. And this surely is the great function of study—not simply to fill the mind with ideas, but to help us towards self-expression, or rather to help the living Spirit of Truth which is in each of us towards the freest and fullest utterance. The end of all education is just to bring out what of divine truth and goodness each soul contains ; and the writings of the wise and saintly have their value in the witness they bear to our own inmost convictions, in the witness they bear with our spirits that we are the children of God, and that something of the divine nature is seeking to reveal itself in and through us.

The *Imitation* is a work of the most patient, laborious, literary craftsmanship. The name “ Ecclesiastical Music ” which it has frequently borne, is not inappropriate ; for Thomas handles his theme very much as a

musician does, and chooses words that fall pleasantly and impressively on the ear ; and hence, as Dr. Bigg says, " there are innumerable recurrences of the same note, like the tinkling of little silver bells." When writing he kept in mind the thought that what he wrote would sometimes be read aloud or even chanted ; and in the autograph copy at Brussels, the punctuation is so arranged as to indicate to the reader where the long pauses should be that would allow important words to have their due effect on the listening mind. Most of Thomas' exquisite artistry in words is, of course, lost in translation. It is only occasionally that the assonance of the Latin can be reproduced in the English, as it is in the saying, " homo proponit, sed Deus disponit,"—" man proposes but God disposes." A great part of the *Imitation* is in rhythm, and there are numerous occurrences of rhyme, some of it being of a highly elaborated kind. The eleventh chapter of Book II, " On the Fewness of the Lovers of the Cross of Jesus,"¹ is in metre. Even in the English prose rendering we are made to feel something of the solemn poetry of the original :

" Jesus has many lovers of his heavenly kingdom ; but few bearers of his cross.

¹ *Habet Jesus nunc multos amatores regni sui celestis :
Sed paucos bajulatores suae crucis.
Multos habet desideratores consolationis :
Sed paucos tribulationis.
Plures invenit socios mensae :
Sed paucos abstinentiae.
Omnes cupiunt cum eo gaudere ;
Pauci volunt pro eo aliquid sustinere.
Multi Jesum sequunter usque ad fractionem panis :
Sed pauci usque ad bibendum calicem passionis.
Multi miracula ejus venerantur :
Pauci ignominiam crucis sequuntur. Etc.*

“ He has many that long for consolation ; but few that long for tribulation.

“ He finds many companions of his table, but few of his fast.

“ All desire to rejoice with him ; few are willing to suffer anything for him.

“ Many follow him unto the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the cup of his passion.

“ Many reverence his miracles, but few follow the ignominy of his cross.”

Thomas' attitude toward the present world is, of course, monastic and mediaeval, the attitude of religious pessimism, which found expression in the twelfth century poem of Bernard of Morlaix, *De contemptu mundi*,—made familiar to us by J. M. Neale's rendering and especially by the hymns taken from it—“ Brief life is here our portion,” and “ Jerusalem the golden.” Whether Thomas was acquainted with that poem, we do not know ; but it is interesting to notice that the first chapter of the *Imitation* is entitled *De imitatione Christi et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi* ; and a contempt of all worldly business and pleasure is characteristic of the book as a whole. But this despising of the world, this sense of detachment from the affairs of the present life, and expectation of real happiness only in the life to come—though much exaggerated in the Middle Ages—has to some extent characterised Christianity from the beginning. It represents indeed a recurrent feeling of the human heart amid the strangeness and sorrow and evanescence of mortal things. That Thomas à Kempis was not altogether without a sense of the divinity of the

world, is evident from such a saying as this: "If thy heart were right, then every creature would be unto thee a mirror of life and a book of holy doctrine. There is no creature so small and abject but it reflects the goodness of God" (ii. 4); and a very sane other-worldliness finds expression in the advice: "Use temporal things; desire eternal." (iii. 16.)

Thomas was a monk, and it was mainly for the use and edification of his brethren in the monasteries that the *Imitation* was written. But the human heart is very much the same everywhere, whether it beat under the garb of monk or merchant; and so true is the *Imitation* to our essential human nature that it has appealed, like the Bible itself, to all sorts and conditions of men. It is a transcript from life. In setting down what he had himself deeply felt, Thomas was expressing and reflecting the common experience. Perhaps the secret of its power and the kind of influence it has exerted have never been better described than they were by George Eliot, when she tells what the reading of the book meant to Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*.

"A strange thrill passed through Maggie while she read, as if she had been wakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor. Here then was a secret of life which would enable her to renounce all other secrets—here was a sublime height to be reached without the help of outward things—here was insight and strength and conquest to be won by means entirely within her own soul, where a supreme Teacher was waiting to be heard. It flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem, that all

the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure, as if that were the central necessity of the universe ; and for the first time she saw the possibility of shifting the positions at which she looked at the gratification of her own desires—of taking her stand out of herself, and looking at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole. . . . This small old-fashioned book, for which you need only pay sixpence at a book-stall, works miracles to this day . . . turning bitter waters into sweetness. . . . It was written down by a hand that waited for the heart's promptings ; it is the chronicle of a solitary, hidden anguish, struggle, trust and triumph. . . . And so it remains to all time a lasting record of human needs and consolations,—the voice of a brother, who, ages ago, felt and suffered and renounced, in the cloister, perhaps with serge gown and tonsured head, with much chanting and long fasts, and with a fashion of speech different from ours, but under the same silent far-off heavens, and with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the same failures, the same weariness."

The *Imitation* is at once one of the most intimate and self-revealing and one of the most impersonal of devotional books. Even when Thomas uses the personal pronoun "I," it is in an almost impersonal sense—as when he says : "I had rather feel compunction than know the definition thereof." Sometimes he seems to be describing an incident in his own life, but he does so in quite an impersonal way. Thus he is probably referring to something in his own experience when he writes : "One that was in sore anxiety, and often wavered between hope and fear, and once was mastered

by sorrow, prostrated himself in a church before an altar in prayer, and said within himself, ' O if I knew I should yet persevere ! ' Presently he heard the divine answer within him : ' But if thou didst know, what wouldest thou do ? Do now what thou wouldest do then, and thou shalt be free from fear.' And being herewith comforted and strengthened, he committed himself to the will of God ; and that anxious fluctuation ceased." (i, 25).

But self-effacing as Thomas seeks to be, the book is, as already said, most intimate and self-revealing. It palpitates with the emotions that surge through his soul. In reading it we feel as though we were overhearing one who is speaking to himself even more than he is consciously addressing others. If the true sermon is that which the preacher has first preached to himself, the *Imitation* is full of such sermons. Thomas writes, not from hearsay, but as one who has himself seen and known. It is this that gives the note of authority to his teaching, as in his great chapter " On the Way of the Holy Cross " :

" Go where thou wilt, seek whatsoever thou wilt, thou shalt not find a higher way above, nor a safer way below than the way of the Holy Cross.

" Dispose and order all things according to thy will and judgement ; yet thou shalt ever find, that of necessity thou must suffer somewhat, either willingly or against thy will, and so thou shalt ever find the Cross.

" For either thou shalt suffer pain in thy body, or in thy soul thou shalt suffer tribulation.

" Sometimes thou shalt be forsaken of God, sometimes thou shalt be troubled by thy neighbours ; and, what is more, oftentimes thou shalt be wearisome to thyself.

“ Neither canst thou be delivered nor eased by any remedy or comfort ; for so long as it pleaseth God, thou must bear it.

“ For God will have thee learn to suffer tribulation without comfort ; and that thou submit thyself wholly to him, and by tribulation become more humble.

“ No man hath in his heart a sympathy with the passion of Christ so much as he that hath suffered the like himself.

“ The Cross therefore is always ready and everywhere waits for thee. Thou canst not escape it whithersoever thou runnest ; for wheresoever thou goest, thou carriest thyself with thee.

“ Both above and below, without and within, which way soever thou dost turn thee, everywhere thou shalt find the Cross, and everywhere of necessity thou must hold fast patience, if thou wilt have inward peace and enjoy an everlasting crown.

“ If thou bear the Cross patiently, it will bear thee, and lead thee to the desired end, where there shall be an end of suffering, though here there shall not be.

“ If thou bear it unwillingly, thou makest for thyself a burden, and increasest thy load, and yet notwithstanding thou must bear it.

“ If thou cast away one cross, without doubt thou shalt find another, and that perhaps a more heavy one.

“ Set thyself, therefore, like a good and faithful servant of Christ, to bear manfully the Cross of thy Lord, who out of love was crucified for thee.” (ii. 12).

But if Thomas knew that hardship of some kind besets every lot, he knew also something of the blessings and possibilities of blessedness that are within the reach of

all. Here is a series of his beatitudes that we may set beside the Gospel ones :

“ Blessed is the soul that heareth the Lord speaking within her, and receiveth from his mouth the word of consolation.

“ Blessed are the ears that gladly receive the pulses of the Divine whisper, and give no heed to the many whisperings of the world.

“ Blessed indeed are those ears which listen not after the voice which is sounding without, but for the truth teaching within.

“ Blessed are the eyes which are shut to outward things, but intent on things internal.

“ Blessed are they that enter far into inward things, and endeavour to prepare themselves more and more by daily exercises, for the receiving of heavenly secrets.

“ Blessed are they who are glad to have time to spare for God, and shake off all worldly impediments.” (iv. 1.)

The *Imitation* is a book that stimulates the desire to pray, and a great deal of it is in the form of prayer. Such is the well-known passage :

“ The children of Israel in times past said unto Moses, ‘ Speak thou unto us, and we will hear ; let not the Lord speak unto us lest we die.’

“ Not so, Lord, not so, I beseech thee ; but rather with the prophet Samuel, I humbly and earnestly entreat, ‘ Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.’

“ Let not Moses speak unto me, nor any of the prophets, but rather do thou speak, O Lord God, the inspirer and enlightener of all the prophets ; for thou, alone without them, canst perfectly instruct me, but they, without thee, can profit nothing.’

“ They indeed may sound forth words, but they cannot give the Spirit.

“ Most beautifully do they speak, but if thou be silent, they inflame not the heart.

“ They teach the letter, but thou openest the sense ; they bring forth mysteries, but thou unlockest the meaning of sealed things.

“ They declare thy commandments, but thou helpst us to fulfil them.

“ They point out the way, but thou givest strength to walk in it.

“ They work outwardly only, but thou instructest and enlightenest the heart.

“ They water, but thou givest the increase. They cry aloud in words, but thou impartest understanding.

“ Let not Moses speak unto me, but thou, O Lord, my God, the Everlasting Truth ; lest I die and prove unfruitful, if I be only warned outwardly and not inflamed within.

“ Lest it turn to my condemnation—the Word heard and not fulfilled, known and not loved, believed and not observed.

“ Speak, therefore, Lord, for thy servant heareth ; for thou hast the words of eternal life.

“ Speak thou unto me, to the comfort, however imperfect, of my soul, and to the amendment of my whole life, and to thy praise and glory and honour everlasting.”
(iii. 2.)

The *Imitation*, we remember, was written more especially for those who had made religion their vocation ; and so, with a prayer written for their use, we may fittingly conclude : “ O Almighty God do thou assist us

with thy grace, that we who have undertaken the office of the ministry may be able to wait on thee worthily and devoutly in all purity and with a good conscience. And if we cannot walk in such innocency of life as we ought to do, grant to us at least worthily to lament the sins which we have committed, and, in the spirit of humility and the purpose of a good will, to serve thee more earnestly for the time to come." (iv. 11.)

VI

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES' *INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE*

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES was born at Annecy, about 22 miles from Geneva, in 1567, and died in 1622. He belonged to an old family of wealth and consideration in the neighbourhood, and the family had remained loyal to the Catholic Church when most of the population around had turned Protestant at the Reformation. At the end of his school days, he was sent to Paris for a course of study which lasted about seven years; and from there he went to Padua to learn law, as his father intended him for the legal profession. He was four years at Padua, and on his return home he found that he had been appointed Advocate to the Senate of Savoy. But his real interests had all along been in religion, and at length he wrung from his father a reluctant consent to his devoting himself to the vocation on which his heart was set. In 1593 he was made Provost of the Chapter of the Cathedral at Geneva. Soon by his preaching, and the charm of his personality, and the consecration of his life, his influence began to be felt. He had already made some notable conversions from the Calvinism of which Geneva was the headquarters, when, in 1594, he undertook what seemed to others a forlorn hope—a mission to win back the Chablais district to the Catholic allegiance. With only one companion, his cousin, he set out and reached Thonon, the principal town of the Chablais,

and began to preach, and, when he found that the people would not come to hear him, he distributed leaflets. According to his Catholic biographers, the enterprise was a very dangerous one, and various attempts on his life are said to have been made. But even if we cannot believe all that is told of the wickedness of the Calvinists in their endeavour to frustrate and suppress his mission, we can well understand that they made the work as difficult for him as possible. The success which in two or three years crowned his efforts owed much no doubt to the sympathy and support of the Duke of Savoy, in whose territory the Chablais was now included, and at whose instigation indeed the mission had been undertaken. But, as Charles Beard said in the chapter on St. Francis de Sales in his *Port Royal*, "Spiritual effects are produced only by spiritual means, and there can be no doubt that the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries mark the epoch of a great spiritual awakening of religious life in Catholic Europe." The work of St. Francis de Sales was one of the evidences of that awakening, which had already, before his time, shown itself in the establishment of the Society of Jesus and of other agencies for the recovery of the ground which the Church had lost at the Reformation. His missionary labours were carried on with the utmost zeal and self-forgetfulness. To friends who told him that he ought to spare himself, or he would wear himself out, he replied, "It is not necessary that I should live, but it is necessary that the Church should be served." Forty-three years after his death he was canonised, and in the papal bull authorising his canonization, it is stated that he had converted 72,000 Protestants.

But that, if true, would be an achievement of doubtful value ; and at any rate it is not upon it that I would rest his claim on your attention now. It is as the author of a famous devotional work, the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, and of the subject of one of the finest religious biographies, *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, that he comes within the range of our present studies.

We naturally like to know how a book which we value came into being ; and we are not left uninformed as to the circumstances in which the *Introduction to the Devout Life* was written.

It has been said that people now-a-days are not concerning themselves about their souls ; and that may or may not be a good sign, according to what is meant by it. But back in the early part of the seventeenth century, people were very much concerned about their souls. There was a widespread desire to cultivate the inner life, this being especially the case in the higher ranks of society. " Perhaps its most characteristic outcome was the rise of professed Directors of Conscience—divines who specialised in spiritual ailments ; they stood to ordinary confessors much as a consulting physician stands to a general practitioner. No doubt their rise was not an altogether healthy sign, and a director often aggravated the ills he was sent to cure. He became the natural target for all the morbid scrupulosity and self-analysis which idle and luxurious lives produce. . . . But the prominence of Direction was a strong acknowledgement of the need of personal religion."¹

Among those who were most deeply impressed by the preaching of Francis de Sales was a lady, Madame de

¹ *Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. v. p. 79.

Charmois, and he became her Director of Conscience ; and it was in the notes which he made for her spiritual guidance that the material for the *Introduction* first took shape. But the book embodies the results of his experience as director of many other consciences besides hers, and it is this experience that gives the book its special character and value. It is the work of one who has been dealing with souls in the most intimate manner, and of one moreover who is gifted with extraordinary insight and sympathy. " This direction of souls," says M. Fortunat Strowsky, " is an art so complex, and at the same time so delicate, that we can call it perfect in its kind and sufficient in itself ; it is absorbing enough to occupy all the activity of a vigorous mind, and so fascinating as to make him forget all other horizons. But if one were able, after having practised it well, to disengage oneself from it, what riches one would have amassed ! What a preparation for a philosopher or moralist ! An experience so varied, so extensive, and so intimate would be, for one who could make use of it, a royal foundation. Imagine how one could employ it to develop and support a doctrine ! Would he not be better equipped than anyone else ? Well," continues this writer, " St. Francis de Sales was able to disengage himself from the direction of souls in order to write a book embodying what it had taught him, and this book was not a simple letter of direction, more full, more complete, more general, more impersonal, but a true book, giving us the profound thought as well as the philosophy of conduct which he brought to bear on the consciences of men and women."¹ It is the fault of

¹ *Saint François de Sales*. Deuxième édition, pp. 236-7.

many books of devotion as of many sermons, that they deal too much with abstractions, and have little contact with the real thoughts and needs of men ; but Francis' experience as a director of consciences helped to keep him free from this fault, and to make his readers feel that the book is written with an understanding sympathy.

The *Introduction* differed from most books of devotion that had been written before in being addressed not to the cloister but to men and women "in the world." In his preface Francis says : "Almost all who have treated hitherto of devotion have had in view the instruction of persons wholly retired from the world, or at least have taught a kind of devotion leading to this absolute retirement. My intention is to instruct such as live in town, or families, or at court, and who by their condition, are obliged to lead, as to externals, the ordinary life."

From the fact that the book was written more particularly for women, and owes much of its inspiration to them, one is apt to think that the kind of religion it inculcates must be lacking in strength and robustness. But although there was much that was truly feminine in the soul of Francis, much love and gentleness, there was nothing effeminate ; and in the *Introduction* there is plenty of vigorous thinking and stern but wholesome counsel, equally good for both sexes, and bearing on a great variety of matters and circumstances. It is written of course from the strictly Roman Catholic point of view, and by one convinced that outside the Church of Rome there was no salvation ; but we know that such assumptions have not been peculiar to Roman Catholic writers, and have been found sometimes in union with a great deal

of practical common sense and spiritual wisdom. And it is for its practical common sense and spiritual wisdom that the *Introduction* has been valued by Protestants and Catholics alike.

In the opening chapters, Francis describes what he means by devotion and the devout life. "True and living devotion," he says, "presupposes the love of God, or rather it is nothing else than the true love of God, and such a love of him as makes us do his will with the utmost eagerness." It is a certain lightness and vivacity of spirit, by means of which we do whatever we are given to do promptly and diligently and exactly. When we act thus in the spirit of love and gladness and good will, then, and only then, are we truly devout. Devotion is simply a heightened or intensified love or charity. "If," he says, "love be milk, devotion is the cream ; if love be a plant, devotion is the flower ; if love be a precious stone, devotion is its lustre ; if love be a precious balm, devotion is the odour." And this kind of devotion may be cultivated by every one, and will make all who practise it better in every relation of life—as members of families, as neighbours, as citizens, and more acceptable in their different callings.

True devotion, according to Francis, begins with the purification of the soul from sin, and such purification is a life-long process. "The diseases of the soul, as well as those of the body, come post-haste on horseback, but go away on foot at a snail's pace. Courage and patience, then, are needed for this enterprise. . . . Let us not worry ourselves because we have imperfections, for our perfection consists in resisting them, and we cannot resist them without seeing them, nor vanquish

them without encountering them. Our victory does not lie in not feeling them, but in not consenting to them ; nay it is necessary for the exercise of our humility that we be sometimes wounded in this spiritual combat ; but we are never conquered, except when we have lost either life or courage. . . . It is a happy condition of this war that if we fight valiantly we are always conquerors." (Part i, Ch. v.)

Francis, as a true director of souls, is very skilful in his spiritual diagnosis. He knows of penitents who have forsaken their sin "in fact, but not in affection," and he points out that it is only when they hate it that they are really being delivered from it. He believes in starting the day with spiritual exercises—with what he calls "a little nosegay of devotion," and he explains his meaning in this way : "One who has been walking in a beautiful garden does not willingly go away without gathering four or five flowers to keep and smell at the whole day after ; so," he says, "when our spirit has been expatiating in some mystery of divine grace, we ought to select one or two or three points which we have found most pleasant, and which are most proper for our advancement, to think frequently on them, and to smell them as it were spiritually for the rest of the day." (Part ii, Ch. vii.) And indeed in order to gain the devout spirit, what is more helpful than beginning the day with a few good thoughts to which the mind can return from time to time ? It is by such means that the level of life is kept high and pure. Beginning the day with some such simple exercise as he suggests, we shall find, he says, that all we do shall be watered with the blessing of God. And if it be important to begin the day devoutly, it is no

less important to end it so. "Give me a great thought," said the dying philosopher. So Francis would have us fall asleep with some good thought in our minds, for our thoughts then have much to do in making us what we are. "By the exercise of the morning," he says, "you open the windows of your soul to the Sun of Righteousness, and by that of the evening you close them against the darkness of hell." (Part ii, Ch. xi.)

And even in the midst of the business of the day, he tells us, we should find opportunities for devout thought and prayer. There are no circumstances in which this is not possible. "When," he says, "the father and mother of St. Catherine of Sienna had deprived her of every opportunity of place and leisure to pray and meditate, our Lord inspired her to make a little interior oratory within her soul, into which, retiring mentally, she might, amidst her external affairs, have leisure in this holy solitude of the heart. . . . Withdraw then your spirit from time to time into your heart, where, separated from all men, you may familiarly treat on the business of your soul with God. . . . The spirit which thus gives itself to habitual confidential intercourse with God, will be altogether perfumed with his perfections. And this exercise will not hinder us but rather assist us in whatever we are about. . . . The pilgrim who takes a little wine to cherish his heart and refresh his mouth, although he stops a moment for it, does not interrupt his journey by doing so, but rather acquires strength to finish it with more ease and expedition, stopping only that he may go faster. . . . In fine, they that love with a human and natural affection have their thoughts always turned towards the object of their love, their heart full of

affection for it, and their mouth filled with its praises ; and when absent they lose no opportunity to testify their affection by letters, and meet not a tree on whose bark they do not write the name of their beloved ; even so, they who love God can never cease to think on him, sigh for him, aspire to him ; and they would, if it were possible, engrave the sacred name of Jesus on the breasts of all mankind.” (Part ii, Chs. xii and xiii.)

Again, his happy way of illustrating spiritual principles is shown in such counsels as these :

“ Do as little children do : little children, who with one hand hold fast by their father, and with the other gather strawberries or blackberries along the hedges ; do you, while gathering and managing the goods of this world with one hand, with the other always hold fast the hand of your heavenly Father, turning to him from time to time to see if your actions or occupations are pleasing to him ; but take heed, above all things, that you never let go his hand, thinking to gather more ; for should he let you go, you will never be able to take another step without falling.” And further on he says : “ You should look to God from time to time like mariners, who, to arrive at the port to which they are bound, look more upward toward heaven than down on the sea on which they sail ; thus will God work with you, and in you, and for you.” (Part iii, Ch. x.)

Francis de Sales’ insistence on the need for cultivating what he calls the small virtues is one of the outstanding and oft recurring features of his teaching. “ Occasions,” he says in the *Introduction*, “ are seldom presented for the exercise of fortitude, magnanimity, and munificence ; but meekness, temperance, modesty, and humility are

virtues wherewith all the actions of our life ought to be tinged." And elsewhere he says,

" We ought to cherish the small virtues that grow at the foot of the Cross, for they are watered with the blood of the Son of God. These virtues are humility, patience, sweet temper, kindness, helpfulness, goodwill, heartiness, sympathy, readiness to forgive, simplicity, truthfulness, and others like them. Such virtues are like the violets, which love the coolness of the shade, which are fed with dew, and which, though they have no brilliancy, cease not to shed fragrance around. There are great virtues on the top of the Cross, which have great splendour, especially when they are accompanied with love ; such are wisdom, justice, zeal, liberality, and the like ; and everyone wishes to have these virtues because they are the most esteemed and make us the most thought of. But we should not judge of the greatness or littleness of a virtue by that which it appears to the outward eye ; for a virtue that is very small in appearance may be practised with great love to God, while one that is more shining may go along with very little love ; yet this is the measure of their true value before God. I put more value on prayer, which is the torch of all the virtues ; on devotion, which consecrates all our actions to the service of God ; on humility, which makes us have a low esteem of ourselves, and of our actions ; on sweet temper, which makes us kind to all the world, on patience, which makes us bear all things ; than on heroism, magnanimity, liberality, which do not cover so much ground, and are more seldom in use. And these more splendid virtues are a little dangerous,

because their brilliancy gives more occasion for vain glory, which is the true poison of all the virtues."¹

And just as the cultivation of the small virtues should be our chief concern, since they are most needed in the daily round of our activities, most needed for the peace and happiness and help of those about us ; so it is in bearing the small ills and annoyances of our daily life, rather than in meeting great sorrows and trials, which come only now and then, that the truly devout spirit shows itself, and real progress in the inner life is made. The hand of the spiritual director surely reveals itself in such a passage as this : " Suffer meekly those small injuries, those little inconveniences, those inconsiderable losses which daily befall you ; for by means of such little occasions as these, managed with love and affection, you will gain God's heart entirely, and make it your own. These little daily charities, this headache or toothache, this ill humour of husband or wife, this breaking of a glass, this slight or rudeness, this loss of a pair of gloves, of a ring, or of a handkerchief ; this little self-denial . . . in short, all these trivial sufferings, being accepted and embraced with love, are richly pleasing to the Divine Goodness, who, in return for a cup of cold water only, has promised an ocean of all felicity to his faithful ones. And since these occasions present themselves every moment, to manage them well is a great means to heap up a store of spiritual riches." (Part iii, Ch. xxxv.)

Here and there in the *Introduction* we come upon sayings that remind us of things in Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* ; as, for example, in the chapter on being just and reasonable, where we read :

¹ See *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, Part II, Ch. I, 7-9.

“ It is reason that makes us men, and yet it is a rare thing to find men truly reasonable, because self-love usually leads us astray from reason, drawing us insensibly into a thousand small yet dangerous injustices and wrongs. . . . We condemn every little thing in our neighbours, and excuse ourselves in things that are great ; we want to sell very dear and buy very cheap ; we desire that justice should be exercised in another’s house, but mercy and connivance in our own ; we would have everything *we* say taken in good part, but we are sensitive and touchy about what others say to us ; we would have our neighbour sell us his property at the price we offer, but is it not more reasonable that he should keep his goods and leave us our money ? We take it ill that he will not accommodate us, but has he not more reason to be offended that we should desire to incommode him ? . . . We exact our own dues strictly, but we would have others lenient in demanding theirs ; we are punctilious in maintaining our own rank, but would have others humble and condescending ; we soon find fault with our neighbour, but none must find fault with us ; what we do for others seems always very great, but what others do for us seems as nothing . . . We have two weights—one to weigh to our advantage, and the other to weigh to the detriment of our neighbour, . . . a greater to receive with and a less to deliver out withal. . . . Be fair and just in all your actions ; put yourself always in your neighbour’s place, and put him in yours, and you will judge rightly ; imagine yourself the seller when you are buying, and the buyer when you are selling, and you will sell and buy justly. These injustices are trifling, and do not require us to make

restitution, inasmuch as they only consist in taking rigorous advantage of the conditions in our favour ; yet we are bound to amend them, for they are great defects in reason and charity, and little better than cheating. Believe me, one loses nothing by being generous, noble and courteous, with a heart royal, just and reasonable. Therefore remember frequently to examine whether your heart is such towards your neighbour, as you would have his towards you, were you in his place ; for this is the touchstone of true reason.”
(Part iii, Ch. xxxvi.)

Francis de Sales was the author of several books besides the *Introduction*, the best known among them being one *On the Love of God* ; but it is doubtful whether any of these other books of his is quite so precious as one that was written about him by his friend and disciple, Jean Pierre Camus, and is called *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*. Camus was bishop of a diocese close to that of Geneva, and he lived on terms of the greatest intimacy with Francis, for whom he had the utmost affection and reverence. Happily he was gifted with a Boswell-like memory, and he has given us one of the best lives of the saints ever written. Its title is very appropriate, for it is indeed the spirit of Francis, the singularly pure and wise and gracious spirit which breathes in the *Introduction* that we find in this delightful memoir. We get in this book many an illustration of Francis' skill as a director of souls. We find him dealing with all sorts and conditions of men and women, and for each of them he has the word in season. People came to him with their complaints and sorrows and sins, and they got the counsel they needed, though it was not

always just what they expected, or liked at the moment. To Camus himself, who complained bitterly of a wrong which some one had done him, Francis said, "Cannot you see God's will in that—how he permits the trial and makes use of man's wickedness to correct your faults and confirm your strength? You delight in wearing a gold cross upon your breast, while you cannot bear the tiniest inward cross without striving to cast it out by murmuring! And you would fain have me to believe you patient; just as if the real result of patience would be freedom from resentment and complaint." (Part ii, Ch. v. 5.)

Francis thought it was well never to talk about oneself, either in praise or blame, save when really necessary, and even then with great reserve. Self-blame and self-praise spring from vanity, he used to say. "As to boasting, that," he said, "is so purely ridiculous as to be condemned by all men, and words of self-depreciation, unless they are intensely sincere, and spring from a strong conviction of worthlessness, are a very refined form of vanity. He who utters them rarely believes them himself, or really wishes others to believe them; he only intends to be thought very humble; and therein he is like an oarsman who turns his back to the point towards which he rows." (Part ii, Ch. vi. 3.)

He often, says Camus, took people at their word when they made humble speeches in his presence, sometimes indeed giving greater emphasis to such expressions, so as to bring those who uttered them to confusion. "For instance," says his biographer, "when I first became a bishop, he required of me, as I thought, too high a standard of perfection. 'My dear father,' I said, 'you forget that I have but just left the world, and am

given the office of a teacher almost before becoming a disciple ! You treat me as if I were far advanced in holiness, and able to teach others, whereas I have hardly yet entered within the gate thereof.' ' Quite true,' he answered, ' I probably realise all that even more than you do yourself. I look upon you as a brand snatched from the burning, and still smelling of smoke ; but after all, you are now a bishop, and you must arouse your paternal feelings, and fix your eyes upon perfection. It will not do for you to be content to drink from your own cistern ; you must impart its waters to others. God, reason, and your office alike demand it of you ; you must not look behind unless you would become a statue. If you trust in yourself, you will never do anything, but if you trust in God, there is nothing you may not do. He delights in showing forth his strength in our weakness, his power in our helplessness, in confounding that which is by the things that are not. Mistrust of self is a very blessed thing, provided it is accompanied by trust in God, and the further you advance in the one, the more earnest the other will be. But all distrustful humility is a false humility.' "

On another occasion a lady who had been elected Superior of a convent declined the appointment with great professions of unworthiness. Francis reiterated all her assertions even more strongly than she herself, saying that " doubtless she was but a poor creature, and all the sisters knew her incapacity, the narrowness of her mind, the weakness of her judgment, her want of manner, her numberless failings, and her lack of power to set a good example ; but that God perhaps allowed her election in order to correct these faults, now that she

was to be placed in a responsible position before him as well as in the sight of men and angels. He reminded her that the community was not entrusted to her but to God, who often chooses the weak to confound the wise of this world, through the foolishness of the Cross. . . . It was thus our dear father taught his children to avoid all such vain words as borrow the mask of humility and showed pride beneath a false lowliness." (Part ii, Ch. vi. 10.)

Francis, we are told, was most gentle and compassionate, but there was a great deal of strength and vigour in his character too ; like steel, which is stronger in proportion to the delicacy with which it is tempered. He could not bear people to be soft and indulgent to themselves, and always, says Camus, made war upon such tenderness when he came across it ; distinguishing however between weakness or infirmity and this tenderness of self. No one could be more compassionate to sinners, especially to such as fall through infirmity and without premeditation ; but he was always severe towards those who were indulgent to themselves, saying that such indulgence, whether bodily or mental, was as opposed to all true devotion as over-anxiety or hurry, both being evidences of self-love.

Francis had the love that desires to think no evil. To some one who asked him if it is wrong to entertain well-founded suspicions, he answered, " ' No ; because to suspect is not to judge, only a step towards it. But we should be very careful not to be misled by false indications, and so to form hasty judgments ; this is the rock upon which many a rash judgment splits.' To avoid this error, he had an excellent rule, namely, that if any action could be seen under a hundred different aspects,

we ought always to choose that one which is most favourable. If we cannot find any excuse for the act itself, we may lessen its evil character by imputing some good intention ; and if there is nothing to be said on that score, we should take into consideration the violence of temptation, or attribute it to ignorance, sudden assault, or human frailty, so as to take away from the inevitable blame involved. He used to say that people who keep a strict watch over their consciences seldom fall into the snare of rashly judging others ; it is a habit which rather belongs to idle people, who take little heed of their own actions, while they are very much addicted to picking to pieces those of their neighbours." (Part ii, Ch. x. 20.)

He thought that a man should be satisfied with his own calling and make the best of himself. " Do not trifle over other things," he would say, " do not sow a crop of good intentions in another man's garden, but cultivate your own diligently. Do not wish to be anything save what you are, but strive to be that perfectly. Fix all your thoughts on that, and on bearing every cross, great and small, which it involves. . . . What is the good of building castles in Spain, when you must live in France ? " He believed that if people would act on this principle, they would find great peace. " Be at peace," he said to one who was yielding to depression, " and let your soul feed upon the sweetness of heavenly love, without which our hearts were lifeless, our life joyless. Give no place to sadness, the great enemy of devotion. What should sadden one who serves the Everlasting Joy ? Nothing save sin ought to vex or grieve us ; and even when sorry for sin, holy joy and hope should come to the rescue." (Part ii, Ch. xii. 19.)

And while thus seeking to be himself, and to fill his own position perfectly, he was ever most respectful towards others. He has been called "the gentlemanly saint." He showed a fine and unfailing courtesy and was a truly humble as well as holy man of heart. "I have often," says his biographer, "observed how he treated every one, even the most insignificant persons who approached him, as though he were himself the inferior, never repulsing anyone, never refusing to enter into conversation, to speak or listen ; never betraying the slightest sign of weariness, impatience or annoyance, however importunate or ill-timed the interruption. His constant thought was : ' It is God's will ; it is what he requires of me ; what more need I ask ? While I am doing this I am not required to do anything else. God's will is the centre whence all we do must radiate ; all else is mere weariness and excitement.' " (Part iii, Ch. i. 7)

Francis would have us pay little heed to the world's opinion. He would have us do God's will and not be men-pleasers ; and he illustrated his advice by a story. The principal of a college committed the charge of the college clock to an old man, who wanted something to occupy him, but who ere long complained that he had never been given a more troublesome or vexatious task. "What, winding up the weights twice a day ?" exclaimed the principal in amazement. "Oh, no, it is not that ; it is that I am so worried on all sides. If the clock is a few moments slow, the students from within are down upon me, and then if, to please them, I put it on a few minutes, the students outside grumble, and say our time is fast. Perhaps I put it back to silence their complaints, and the others begin again, till my poor

head might as well be the clapper of the bell, I am so bothered with the whole thing." The principal comforted him by telling him to give kind words to all, but meanwhile to let the clock be, and not try to adapt its time to one or other. "So," said Francis, "if you trouble yourself as to what is said of you, you will have no end of worry. You must be courteous to everybody ; but meanwhile go your own way, be reasonable, do not try to follow all the contradictory advice you are certain to receive ; fix your mind on God, and follow the leadings of his grace. We ought to care but little for men's judgment since our object is not to please them ; God is our judge, and he sees into the most hidden corners of our hearts." (Part iii, Ch. iii. 6.)

A favourite maxim of Francis was "Make haste slowly." He always aimed at doing a little well. He sought to gain ground step by step. "Real progress," he said, "is in moving on imperceptibly. God himself, to whom time is not, yet brings his works to perfection by such gradual and gentle ways as are well-nigh imperceptible." So we are to be patient with the slow development of our own souls, and of the souls of others, and with the slow progress of any work in which we are interested and active. We must abide God's time. He is at least as interested in the work as we are ourselves.

Such then is the wisdom of Francis de Sales, a wisdom surely that is from above, pure, gentle, peaceable, full of mercy and good fruits, the wisdom of one of the saintliest and most radiant spirits that have ever visited, the earth.

VII

JOHN BUNYAN'S *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

BUNYAN'S *Pilgrim's Progress* is one of the three outstanding classics of devotional literature—the other two being Augustine's *Confessions* and Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*. With Augustine Bunyan has more in common than with à Kempis ; though in comparing him with Augustine we are struck at first rather by the contrast than by the resemblance between them. Augustine was trained in all the learning of his time, a scholar by profession, a philosopher and theologian of the highest order ; whereas Bunyan was a man of practically no education : as he himself says, he “ never went to school to Aristotle and Plato,” and the great problems of speculative philosophy had no existence for him. Yet beneath all this intellectual difference there was a striking similarity of spiritual experience, and it is reflected in their writings. Augustine's *Confessions* might very well have been called a pilgrim's progress, and Bunyan's book might have been called his confessions for through the allegory he sought like Augustine to show how he had erred and sinned and how God in His mercy had saved him. The resemblance is even more striking between Augustine's *Confessions* and Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, since, like the *Confessions*, *Grace Abounding* is a personal narrative in which Bunyan tells the story of his life and of his sin and of the manner of his salvation.

Among all who have written of the things of the spirit, we can hardly find a greater contrast than exists between Bunyan and à Kempis in their way of life and in the character of their work. The recluse of Mount St. Agnes wrote for recluses like himself, for those who had renounced the world; the Puritan preacher of Bedford wrote for people engaged in the ordinary occupations and beset by the ordinary temptations and trials of life. In Bunyan's writings one does not meet with the things that constitute the special charm of the *Imitation*, nor does one find in the *Imitation* the qualities that make the *Pilgrim's Progress* a joy for ever. The *Imitation* belongs to the wisdom literature of Christendom; the *Pilgrim's Progress* is in form a work of romance, the first of English novels. Still, the contrast between à Kempis and Bunyan is more apparent than real, more outward than inward. After all they drew their inspiration mainly from the same source. The Bible was the constant companion of both, and its influence is discernible in all they wrote. Nor is their general outlook so different as one would at first suppose. They both take a pessimistic view of the present world, regarding it as a place of weary pilgrimage on the way to a better country, to a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. "If," wrote à Kempis, "thou wilt persevere in grace as thou oughtest, and grow therein, esteem thyself as a banished man, and a pilgrim on earth. Thou must be contented for Christ's sake to be esteemed as a fool in this world, if thou desire to lead a religious life."¹ Bunyan might have taken that saying as the motto for his *Pilgrim's Progress*.

¹ i. 17.

Grace Abounding was published in 1666.—It reveals the personality and the personal history that are behind the *Pilgrim's Progress*, the first part of which appeared twelve years later.

John Bunyan was born in a way-side cottage at Elstow, near Bedford, in the year 1628. "In this my relation of the merciful work of God upon my soul, it will not be amiss," he says, "if, in the first place, I do, in a few words, give a hint of my pedigree, and manner of bringing up; that thereby the goodness and bounty of God towards me may be the more advanced and magnified before the sons of men.

"For my descent, then, it was, as is well known by many, of a low and inconsiderable generation; my father's house being of that rank that is meanest and most despised of all the families of the land. Wherefore, I have not here, as others, to boast of noble blood or of any high-born state, according to the flesh; though, all things considered, I magnify the heavenly Majesty for that by this door he brought me into the world to partake of the grace and life that is in Christ by the Gospel. But notwithstanding the meanness and inconsiderableness of my parents, it pleased God to put into their hearts to put me to school to learn me both to read and to write; the which I also attained according to the rate of other poor men's children; though, to my shame, I confess I did soon lose that I had learnt, even almost utterly, and that long before the Lord did work his gracious work of conversion upon my soul."

His father was a tinker or brazier, and to that trade John was set after his schooling days were over, which was very soon. From his earliest years he was subject to

fearful dreams and visions. These, he believed, were sent by God to frighten him out of the wickedness of which he was guilty ; the sins of which he specially accuses himself, and in which he says he had few equals for his age, being " cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God." The boy had, we may suppose, but adopted the prevailing manner of speech and moral tone of his environment, though we may be sure there were other and better elements in the life around him, to which he was no less responsive. Anyhow, his wrong-doing was followed by fits of remorse. So wicked did he feel himself at times to be that he feared, and indeed was very sure, that he was going to Hell, and often wished that, if such was to be his destiny, he might be a devil there, thinking the part of a tormentor preferable to that of the tormented ! But the effect of his frightful dreams and his fears of judgment to come did not last very long ; he went from bad to worse, trying to forget the Divine warnings in the enjoyment of his wicked pleasures. " Wherefore," he says, " with more greediness, according to the strength of my nature, I did let loose the reins of my lust, and delighted in all transgressions against the law of God ; so that, until I came to the state of marriage, I was the very ring-leader of all the youth that kept me company, in all manner of vice and ungodliness." There is the best reason, however, for believing that the picture he thus paints of himself is much blacker than it ought to have been—and that he was not really guilty of the grosser sins of which he seems in this passage to accuse himself. At any rate, we know that afterwards he strongly resented the charge of unchastity which had been brought

against his early life. As we have seen, Bunyan's particular sins were sins of speech—cursing, swearing, blaspheming. He was one who should have been early taught to say with the Psalmist: "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle." Gifted as he was with extraordinary powers of imagination and expression, and feeling the natural impulse to use them, he was inevitably tempted to dazzle his companions (themselves not very choice in their speech) by what Royce calls his "abounding wealth of skilfully bad language."¹ But it was a sign of grace in him that he could not bear to hear such language from the lips of those whom he esteemed better than himself; for he says, on "hearing one to swear that was reckoned a religious man, it had so great a stroke upon my spirit, that it made my heart ache."

He recalls some merciful dealings of God with him. Once, falling into the sea he narrowly escaped drowning. Again, when he was a soldier in the civil war, it was his turn to go on sentry duty at a siege, but just as he was about to go, another man came along and asked to be allowed to go in his stead. On getting Bunyan's consent, he went, and was shot at his post and died. These escapes from death, however, failed to make any serious impression on him at the time, or to bring about any amendment of his life. The first step towards better things was taken when he married at the age of 21. "My mercy," he says, "was to light upon a wife whose father was counted godly. This woman and I, though we came together as poor as poor might be (not having so much household stuff as a dish or a spoon betwixt

¹ *Studies in Good and Evil*, p. 55.

us both), yet this she had for her part, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven*, and *The Practice of Piety*, which her father had left her when he died." A poor legacy, these two books; but more precious than gold; infinitely precious indeed they proved to be, seeing that they helped to start the pilgrim on his way to the Celestial City. They were popular works in their day, but are interesting to us now only because they were among the possessions, so pathetically scanty, of that humble couple who began their married life in a little cottage still standing at Elstow, and because they were among the forerunners of Bunyan's immortal book.¹

The change that was being wrought in Bunyan began to show itself in his regular attendance at Church on Sundays, and in a great reverence for everything pertaining to the Church, including the preacher's vestments. But still he continued to join in the Sunday sports on the village green, as had been the common practice since the issue of King James' *Book of Sports* in 1618, wherein that monarch proclaimed that after service on Sundays, "no lawful recreation should be barred to his good

¹ *The Plainman's Pathway to Heaven*, by Arthur Dent, was first published in 1601. These words from its opening dialogue anticipate many a delightful passage in the *Pilgrim's Progress*:

Philagathus: Well met, good Master Theologus.

Theologus: What! mine old friend Philagathus!

Philagathus: Are you walking here all alone in this pleasant meadow?

Theologus: Yea, for I take some pleasure at this time of the year to walk abroad in the fields for my recreation, both to take the fresh air, and to hear the sweet singing of birds.

Philagathus: Indeed, Sir, it is very comfortable, especially now in this pleasant month of May; and thanks be to God we have had a very forward spring, and as kindly a season as came this seven years.

Theologus: God doth abound towards us in mercies; Oh that we could abound towards him in thanksgiving!

people." He took part in the games without thinking that there was any harm in doing so until one Sunday the clergyman, who was a strict Puritan, preached a sermon against such sports; and Bunyan went home with a heavy heart and an uneasy conscience. But after he had had his mid-day meal the impression of the sermon began to wear off, and by and by he was on the green as usual, and playing the game of Cat. In the midst of the game, however, "a voice," he says, "did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul, which said, 'Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to Heaven, or have thy sins and go to Hell?' At this I was put to an exceeding maze; wherefore, leaving my cat upon the ground, I looked up to Heaven, and was as if I had, with the eyes of my understanding, seen the Lord Jesus looking down upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me, and as if he did severely threaten me with some grievous punishment for those and other ungodly practices." That, it seems, was the moment when Bunyan became, as he would have said, convicted of sin; it was the moment when the Pilgrim became aware of the great black burden on his back. But the immediate effect was to plunge him into despair. As he felt that he had sinned beyond the possibility of recovery, he thought he might as well be damned for many sins as for few; and so he went on with his Sunday games, and his speech continued to be as ribaldrous and ungoverned as ever. But one day, as he was standing at a shop window, and cursing and swearing as usual, the woman who kept the shop, and who was herself rather a disreputable character, overheard him, and she forthwith began to tell him plainly what she thought of him. She said that his language

made her tremble, that he was the ungodliest fellow for swearing she had ever heard, and that he was spoiling all the youth of the place who came into his company. The reproof, coming from such a quarter, filled him with shame ; and, he says, “ while I stood there, hanging down my head, I wished with all my heart that I might be a little child again, that my father might learn me to speak without this wicked way of swearing.” (§27.) And indeed a reform in this respect took place immediately. He gave up using oaths, and found, somewhat to his surprise, that he could say what he wanted to say much more effectively without them. Then he took to reading the Bible, and the neighbours began to think of him as “ a very godly man, a new and religious man, and did marvel much,” he says, “ to see such great and famous reformation in my life and manners,” though, he adds, “ I knew not Christ, nor grace, nor faith, nor hope.” (§31.) He felt well satisfied with himself, and was pleased with the good name he was winning. Still there were some things about which his conscience troubled him from time to time ; two especially. One of these was the pleasure he found in ringing the Church bells. He gave up the practice of it himself ; but after he had done so he could not for a time resist the temptation to go to the Church steeple to watch others doing it, until one day when he was there, he was seized with fear that the bells might fall on him. At this he stood aside under a great beam, where he thought he would be safe. Then it occurred to him that the beam might crash down on him, and he withdrew to the door of the steeple. Finally, in dread lest the steeple itself should tumble upon him, he fled from the place altogether.

The other thing which he was feeling uneasy about was dancing. He had found great delight in it, and it was hard for him to give it up, but at length he did so. When he had gone on thus lopping off such pleasures as in his puritanical judgment he regarded as sinful, he began to think that he was as pleasing in the sight of God as any man in England.

But one day when he was in Bedford he saw some poor women sitting at a door in the sun, and he heard them talking in a way that was strange to him—talking of “the new birth, the work of God in their hearts; of how God had visited their souls with his love in the Lord Jesus, and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted and supported . . . and they spake,” he says, “with such pleasantness of Scripture language, and with such appearance of grace in all they said, that they were to me as if they had found a new world.” It was to their talk, thus apparently so casually, but really—who can doubt it?—so providentially heard, that Bunyan ascribed the beginnings of his real conversion. But it was long before he was to have such a happy faith as those women of Bedford possessed, earnestly and devoutly as he wished for it. They seemed to him to be on one side of a mountain, enjoying the pleasant beams of the sun, while he was on the other shivering and shrinking in the cold. He had a troublesome way to travel ere he found inward peace, and almost every turn of the way is described in *Grace Abounding*, with all its alternations of hope and fear. We are told how he was beset with doubts as to the existence of God and the truth of Christianity; how in an old copy, that hardly held together, of Luther's Commentary on

Galatians, he found something that spoke to his condition ; how he came to think with horror that he had been guilty like Judas of selling Christ, and that he had committed the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit ; we are told what comfort he had got from various Scriptures—including a saying which after long search he found to his surprise and almost to his dismay was not in the canonical books but in the Apocrypha ! At last by associating with the poor women whose talk had so deeply impressed him, and with other like-minded people to whom they introduced him, he learnt the secret of their joy and peace. And having learnt it he could not keep it to himself ; he must make it known to others. “ I thought I could have spoken of God’s love and have told of his mercy even to the very crows that sat upon the ploughed lands before me, had they been capable to have understood me.” (92.) He began to preach here and there to little groups of people, and by and by he became a recognised minister. At the Restoration in 1660, he was arrested and thrown into prison in Bedford as an “ upholder and maintainer of unlawful conventicles.” It was during the first half of his twelve years in prison that he wrote *Grace Abounding*. In the preface, addressed specially to the members of his congregation, he bids them recall the word that first laid hold upon them. “ Have you,” he asks, “ forgot the close, the milk-house, the stable, the barn, and the like, where God did visit your souls ? ” And he goes on to say, in view of any criticism of the book, “ I could have stepped into a style much higher than this, in which I have here discoursed, and could have adorned all things more than I have seemed to do, but I dare not. God did

not play in convincing of me ; the Devil did not play in tempting of me ; neither did I play when I sunk into a bottomless pit, when the pangs of Hell gat hold upon me ; wherefore I may not play in my relating of them, but be plain and simple, and lay down the thing as it was. He that liketh it, let him receive it ; and he that doth not, let him produce a better. Farewell." And then he adds : " My little children, the milk and the honey is beyond this wilderness ; God be merciful to you, and grant that you be not slothful to go in to possess the land."

Such, then, is the personality, and such the personal history behind the *Pilgrim's Progress*. " The Creator," says the author of *Mark Rutherford* in his book on Bunyan, " gets the appointed task out of his servants in many ways. It is sufficient to give some of them love, sunrises and sunsets, and primrose woods in Spring ; others have to be scourged with bloody whips or driven nearly mad with dreams, sleeping and waking, before they do what God has determined for them." It was in this latter way mainly that the writer of the *Pilgrim's Progress* was trained for his task. Yet not in this way alone. His dreams had not all been of the kind that tend to madness ; his life had not all been spent in sore conflict between the flesh and the spirit ; his years had not all been passed in prison. A great deal of experience of a happier nature had gone to the making of him and to the preparation of him for his work. He had been born an English peasant boy. He had found delight in the beautiful open Bedfordshire scenery, in trees and flowers and birds, in the voices of little children, and in all the innocent comedy of human life. And all this happy experience is reflected in the pages of the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

It has been well said that Bunyan "drew more from the world around him than from books. One of the most remarkable qualities of his story is the faithfulness with which it pictures the life of the times. The road on which the pilgrims travel is as realistically described as the pilgrims themselves. It is like an old Roman road in some respects, for it goes up the hill called Difficulty, and across 'the delicate plain called Ease as straight as a rule can make it.' Sometimes there is a high wall by the side of it, and fruit trees hang their branches over the wall to tempt the children. Dogs bark at the travellers as they pass by, and frighten the women 'with the great voice of their roaring.' Other travellers overtake them or meet them on the road; they see men lying asleep by the roadside; they see criminals hanging in irons a little way from it. Sometimes 'a fine pleasant green lane' comes down into the road; on one side of it there is 'a meadow and a stile to go over into it,' or a by-path such as that which leads Christian and Hopeful into the grounds of Giant Despair. It may be called the road to the Celestial City, but it is very like a common English seventeenth-century high-road."¹ So too in the allegory we find the pilgrims encountering the same kind of troubles and dangers as beset the seventeenth-century traveller; getting stuck in the mud of the wretched roads, which had many a Slough of Despond; being attacked by highwaymen, such as those that set upon Valiant-for-Truth and Little-Faith. The Valley of Humiliation, which was "green and beautified with lilies," and in which Christiana and her companions heard the shepherd boy sing:

¹ C. H. Firth, Introduction to *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

He that is down needs fear no fall ;
 He that is low, no pride ;
 He that is humble ever shall
 Have God to be his guide,

has been described as an English Arcadia, which indeed it is. The original of *Vanity Fair* was probably the annual Fair in Bunyan's native village. When he was describing the country of Beulah, "whose air was very sweet and pleasant," he was doubtless thinking of some familiar landscape—though over it, as over everything else on his pilgrim's way, he casts the gleam that never was on sea or land.

To literature, apart from the Bible and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, Bunyan does not seem to have owed much. Some have tried, but apparently without success, to show that he knew Spenser's *Faerie Queen* and that he derived certain of his ideas from it. The probability is that he had little acquaintance with anything in the way of poetry except the metrical Psalms of Sternhold and Hopkins, and other rather doggerel verses such as he found in the *Book of Martyrs*. That he was capable of fairly good verse himself is shown by his poetical prefaces to the *Pilgrim's Progress* ; and by the song which he puts into the mouth of Valiant-for-Truth :

Who would true valour see,
 Let him come hither ;
 One here will constant be,
 Come wind, come weather ;

There's no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim.

Whoso beset him round
With dismal stories,
Do but themselves confound ;
His strength the more is.
No lion can him fright ;
He'll with a giant fight,
But he will have a right
To be a pilgrim.

Hobgoblin, nor foul fiend,
Can daunt his spirit ;
He knows he at the end
Shall life inherit.
Then, fancies, fly away ;
He'll not fear what men say ;
He'll labour night and day
To be a pilgrim.

But although Bunyan owed little to anything that is commonly dignified by the name of literature, he was conversant with what passed as literature in the humble class to which he belonged, and especially was he well read in the chap-books which had a great circulation at the time. It was from them probably that he got his Enchanted Land, his dragons and giants and other figures of old romance. With Francis Quarles' *Emblems, Divine and Moral* (which was published in 1635) he may

have been acquainted, and from it perhaps he got some suggestions which he made use of in his description of Interpreter's House. But wherever he got the ideas or materials, his handling of them was all his own, and by the time he was finished with them they were alive and immortal. Take, for example, his description of the man with the muck rake. For simplicity, directness and force it is like the Gospel parables, and leaves just the same unforgettable impression on the mind as they do.

"The Interpreter took them into his significant rooms, and showed them what Christian, Christiana's husband, had seen some time before. Here, therefore, they saw the man in the cage, the man and his dream, the man that cut his way through his enemies, and the picture of the biggest of all ; together with the rest of those things that were then so profitable to Christian. This done, and after those things had been somewhat digested, by Christiana and her company, the Interpreter takes them apart again, and has them first into a room where was a man that could look no way but downwards, with a muck-rake in his hand ; there stood also one over his head with a celestial crown in his hand, and proffered him that crown for his muck-rake ; but the man did neither look up nor regard, but rake to himself the straws, the small sticks, and the dust of the floor. Then said Christiana, ' I persuade myself that I know somewhat the meaning of this ; for this is a figure of a man in this world ; is it not, good sir ? ' ' Thou hast said right,' said he, ' and his muck-rake doth show his carnal mind. And, whereas thou seest him rather give heed to rake up straws and sticks, and the dust of the floor, than do what he says that calls him from above,

with the celestial crown in his hand ; it is to show that heaven is but a fable to some, and that things here are counted the only things substantial. Now, whereas it was also showed thee, that the man could look no way but downwards, it is to let thee know that earthly things, when they are with power upon men's minds, quite carry their hearts away from God.' Then said Christiana, ' Oh ! deliver me from this muck-rack ! ' ' That prayer,' said the Interpreter, ' has lain by till it is almost rusty. " Give me not riches," is scarce the prayer of one of ten thousand. Straws and sticks, and dust, with most are the great things now looked after.' With that Christiana and Mercy wept, and said, ' It is, alas, too true.' "

Bunyan's characters are all very real, and it would be possible in nearly every case to tell who they are by listening to their talk, so self-revealing it is. Such is the talk of Mr. Worldly-wiseman, when he advises Christian, who has just emerged from the Slough of Despond, to turn aside from the way on which he has set out.

" There is not a more dangerous and troublesome way in the world. . . . Thou hast met with something, as I perceive, already ; for I see the dirt of the Slough of Despond is upon thee ; but that Slough is the beginning of sorrows that do attend those that go on in that way. Hear me, I am older than thou ; thou art like to meet with in the way which thou goest, wearisomeness, painfulness, hunger, perils, nakedness, swords, lions, dragons, darkness, and, in a word, death, and what not ; these things are certainly true, having been confirmed by many testimonies. . . . It is happened unto thee as to other weak men, who meddling with things too high for

them, do suddenly fall into thy distractions ; which distractions do not only unman men, as thine I perceive have done thee, but they run them on desperate ventures, to obtain they know not what. . . . But why wilt thou seek for ease this way, seeing so many dangers attend it, especially since (hadst thou but patience to hear me) I could direct thee to the obtaining of what thou desirest, without the dangers thou, in this way, wilt run thyself into ; yea and the remedy is at hand ! Besides I will add that, instead of these dangers, thou wilt meet with much safety, friendship, and content."

Just so have the worldly-wise spoken in the ears of the pilgrim of faith in every age, from the time of Abraham, who went forth not knowing whither he went, until now.

Very characteristic too is the speech of Mr. By-ends. He declines to tell Christian and Hopeful his name, but every word he utters betrays him.

" So I saw that after they (Christian and Hopeful) were gone out of the Fair, they over-took one that was going before them, whose name was By-ends ; so they said to him : ' What countryman, Sir ? and how far go you this way ? ' He told them that he came from the town of Fair-speech, and that he was going to the Celestial City ; but told them not his name.

" ' From Fair-speech,' said Christian ; ' Is there any good that lives there ? ' ' Yes,' said By-ends, ' I hope.'

Pray, sir, what may I call you ? ' said Christian.

" *By-ends* : ' I am a stranger to you, and you to me ; if you are going this way, I shall be glad of your company ; if not, I must be content.'

" *Christian* : ' This town of Fair-speech,' said Christian,

‘ I have heard of ; and, as I remember, they say, it is a wealthy place.’

“ *By-ends* : ‘ Yes, I will assure you that it is, and I have very many rich kindred there.’

“ *Christian* : ‘ Pray, who are your kindred there ? if a man may be so bold.’

“ *By-ends* : ‘ Almost the whole town ; and in particular, my Lord Turn-about, my Lord Time-server, my Lord Fair-speech (from whose ancestors that town first took its name), also Mr. Smooth-man, Mr. Facing-both-ways, Mr. Any-thing ; and the parson of our parish, Mr. Two-tongues, was my own brother by my father’s side ; and, to tell you the truth, I am become a gentleman of good quality, yet my great-grandfather was but a waterman, looking one way and rowing another, and I got most of my estate by the same occupation.’ ”

Bunyan’s admiration of the soldierly qualities in man comes out in what we are told of Valiant-for-Truth, who had been set upon by three ruffians, and had fought and repulsed them. Great-heart, after listening to his story of the encounter, said to him : “ ‘ Thou hast worthily behaved thyself. Let me see thy sword.’ So he showed it him. When he had taken it in his hand, and looked thereon awhile, he said, ‘ Ha ! it is a right Jerusalem blade.’ . . . Mr. Great-heart was delighted in him, for he loved one greatly that he found to be a man of his hands.”

But remarkable as is Bunyan’s power of suggesting character, it is equalled by his power to call up a scene ; and some of the pictures which he brings before his readers are among the most precious and memorable things in the book. Here is one of them :

“ They went then till they came to the Delectable Mountains ; which mountains belong to the Lord of that hill of which we have spoken before ; so they went up to the mountains to behold the gardens and orchards, the vineyards and fountains of water ; where also they drank, and washed themselves, and did freely eat of the vineyards. Now there were on the tops of these mountains shepherds feeding their flocks, and they stood by the high-way side. The Pilgrims, therefore, went to them, and leaning upon their staffs, as is common with weary pilgrims, when they stand to talk with any one by the way, they asked, Whose Delectable Mountains are these ? And whose be the sheep that feed upon them ? . . . I saw also in my dream that when the shepherds perceived that they were way-faring men, they also put questions to them (to which they made answer as in other places) as, Whence are you ? and how got you into the way ? and by what means have you so persevered therein ? for but few of them that begin to come hither do show their faces on these mountains. But when the shepherds heard their answers, being pleased therewith, they looked very lovingly upon them, and said, Welcome to the Delectable Mountains ! ”

The passages telling of the approach of Christian and his companion, Hopeful, to the Celestial City, and of their entrance into it, have much of the grandeur and beauty of the Apocalypse, on which they largely depend for their imagery.

“ Now while they were drawing near towards the Gate, behold a company of the heavenly host came out to meet them. . . . They compassed them round about on every side ; some went before, some behind, and some

on the right hand, some on the left, as it were to guard them through the upper regions, continually sounding as they went, with melodious noise in notes on high ; so that the very sight was, to them that could behold it, as if Heaven itself was come down to meet them. Thus therefore they walked on together, and as they walked, ever and anon these trumpeters, even with joyful sound, would, by mixing their music with looks and gestures, still signify to Christian and his brother how welcome they were into their company, and with what gladness they came to meet them. And now were these two men as it were in heaven before they came to it ; being swallowed up with the sight of angels, and with hearing of their melodious notes. Here also they had the City itself in view, and they thought they heard all the bells therein to ring, to welcome them thereto ; but above all the warm and joyful thoughts they had about their own dwelling there with such company—Oh ! by what tongue or pen can their glorious joy be expressed ! . . . Now I saw in my dream that these two men went in at the Gate ; and lo ! as they entered, they were transfigured, and they had raiment put on that shone like gold. There were also that met them with harps and crowns ; the harps to praise withal, and the crowns in token of honour. Then I heard in my dream that all the bells in the City rang again for joy ; and that it was said unto them, *Enter ye into the joy of the Lord*. I also heard the men themselves sing with a loud voice, saying, *Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever and ever*. Now just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in

after them, and behold the City shone like the sun ; the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many men with crowns upon their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal. There were also of them that had wings ; and they answered one another without intermission, saying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord. And after that they shut up the gates ; which, when I had seen, I wished myself among them."

The passing hence of Christiana and her friends at the end of the second part of the book is after a somewhat more homely fashion than that of Christian and his companion. They are summoned, as you remember, by post to go to the heavenly city ; and with quiet trust and resignation they depart. What is told of the passing of Valiant-for-Truth is particularly noteworthy.

"After this it was noised abroad that Mr. Valiant-for-truth was taken with a summons. . . . When he understood it he called for his friends, and told them of it. Then said he, I am going to my Father's ; and though with great difficulty I have got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles, who will now be my rewarder. When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the river-side ; into which, as he went, he saith, Death, where is thy sting ? and as he went down deeper, he said, Grave, where is thy victory ? So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side."

VIII

WILLIAM LAW'S *SERIOUS CALL TO A DEVOUT AND HOLY LIFE.*

WHEN Canon Overton wrote the *Life of William Law* (1881) he felt it necessary to give some reasons why the life of one whose name was then so unfamiliar should be written at all. Were the life to be written now there would be no need for apology. William Law's name is no longer an unfamiliar one. After long neglect he has taken his place among the most honoured figures in the history of devotional literature ; and there are probably no writings that are doing more than his to nourish the deepest roots of religious thought and life throughout the English-speaking world at the present time.

He was born in 1686 at King's Cliffe, a village near Stamford, Northamptonshire, where his father was a grocer. He entered Emmanuel College, Cambridge, as a sizar or poor scholar in 1705. The serious bent of his mind even then is evident from the Rules which he drew up for his guidance on becoming a student of the University. Among the Rules, which were eighteen in all, are these :

“ To fix in my mind that I have but one business upon my hands—to seek for eternal happiness by doing the will of God.

“ To examine everything that relates to me in this view as it serves or obstructs this only end of life.

“ To think nothing great or desirable because the world thinks it so ; but to form all my judgments of things from the infallible Word of God, and direct my life according to it.

“ To avoid all concerns with the world, or the ways of it, but where religion requires.

“ To remember frequently, and impress it upon my mind deeply that no condition of this life is for enjoyment, but for trial ; and that every power, ability, or advantage we have, are all so many talents to be accounted for to the Judge of all the world.

“ That the greatness of human nature consists in nothing but in imitating the divine nature.

“ To avoid all excess in eating and drinking.

“ To be always fearful of letting my time slip away without some fruit.

“ To avoid all idleness.

“ To think humbly of myself, and with great charity of all others.

“ To forbear from all evil speaking.

“ To think often of the life of Christ, and propose it as a pattern to myself.”

Law took his degree of B.A. in 1708. He was elected a Fellow of his College and received holy orders in 1711, and graduated as M.A. in the following year. On the accession of George I in 1716, he declined to take the oath of allegiance, and for this he was deprived of his Fellowship and of all prospect of ministering in the Church. It was a great sacrifice which he thus made for conscience sake, and he made it without hesitation and without murmuring—his only trouble being as to the grief and disappointment this apparent spoiling of his

career would cause his mother. Always with the noblest souls, it is not their own sacrifice and suffering about which they are most concerned, but rather is it about the sorrow and the blighting of the hopes of those nearest and dearest to them. In a letter which Law wrote to his brother he pleads with him to try to make the blow as easy for the mother to bear as possible, and he goes on to say : " My prospect indeed is melancholy enough, but had I done what is required of me to avoid it, I should have thought my condition much worse. The benefits of my education seem partly at an end, but that same education had been more miserably lost if I had not learnt to fear something more than misfortunes. . . . I expected to have a greater share of worldly advantages than what I am now likely to enjoy ; but am fully persuaded that if I am not happier for this trial it will be my own fault. . . . I have hitherto enjoyed a large share of happiness ; and if the time to come be not so pleasant, the memory of what is past shall make me thankful. . . . I shall conclude, as I began, with desiring you to say as many comfortable things as you can to my mother, and to persuade her to think with satisfaction upon that condition which, upon my own account, gives me no uneasiness." We may be quite sure that if Law's conscience had been as pliable as that of the Vicar of Bray, we should not have had the *Serious Call* or any of the other books through which he has influenced and enriched the world. There is no spiritual greatness, either of character or service, which has not its foundation in sacrifice.

The fact of his being a Non-juror helps to explain the long neglect of his works on the part of the many ; but

they have never been without some appreciation and without making a profound impression on readers fit though few. "When at Oxford," said Dr. Samuel Johnson, referring to his student days, "I took up Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, expecting to find it a dull book (as such books generally are) and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me; and this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest of religion, after I became capable of rational inquiry." And other notable testimonies to the influence of Law's writings could be cited.

Some years after being deprived of his Fellowship, he was appointed tutor to Edward Gibbon, who became the father of the historian; and when the tutorship came to an end he remained for some years as chaplain to the Gibbon family at Putney, where he was visited frequently by an admiring group of young men, including the poet John Byrom, and John and Charles Wesley. Upon the Wesleys, and the movement which they originated, he had a vital and formative influence. He was indeed a Methodist before the rise of Methodism, as the rules which he laid down for himself at Cambridge show. In all his early devotional writings he pleads for an ordered and disciplined religious life, with regular hours each day for spiritual exercise, and for the carrying out of carefully considered plans of human service. He had already published his *Three Letters to the Bishop of Bangor* (1717), his *Remarks upon the Fable of the Bee* (1723), his *Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection* (1726), and his most important work, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729). Following on these came his little treatise, *The Case of Reason* (1731).

On the death of his patron in 1736, he returned to his native village of King's Cliffe, where he spent the rest of his days, busy in the little study which has been described by Leslie Stephen as "four feet square, furnished with its chair, its writing-table, the Bible and the works of Jacob Boehme." A reader of his *Christian Perfection* had sent him an anonymous gift of six thousand pounds; and it was probably this money that he used for the building of a girls' school at King's Cliffe. It is evident therefore that he himself set an example of the charity upon which he insists so much in his writings; and in every other respect his life was an illustration of the Christian principles which his books inculcate. Gibbon, the historian, says that among the members of his family, Law left "the reputation of a worthy and pious man who believed all that he professed and practised all that he enjoined."

Some years before leaving Putney, he became acquainted with the mystical writings of Jacob Boehme or Behmen, the "inspired cobbler of Görlitz," which had first appeared in English in 1641, and had had a great influence, especially on George Fox and his followers.

Boehme was born in 1575 and died in 1624. He has been called the "Teutonic Philosopher." His philosophy is in many respects difficult to understand. He felt it necessary to use a terminology of his own invention in order to express his meaning, and so, in reading his books, we come across passage after passage in a jargon that tends rather to conceal than to reveal the meaning beneath it. But those who have had the patience to study him until they have become accustomed to his strange ways of expression have found themselves richly

rewarded. Yet the most essential things in his teaching are easily discoverable ; and what these things are we shall the better realise by recalling the circumstances amid which Boehme lived and wrote.

The beginning of the seventeenth century was in Germany, as in England, a time of keen and often angry debate on religious matters. There were many parties or sects, and each of them believed that it had got hold of the truth and the whole truth, and denounced those who differed from it as heretics who should not be tolerated in this world and would have little or no chance of salvation in the next. When Boehme realised how much ill feeling and unhappiness was caused by all this wrangling about Christian doctrine, he began to doubt whether Christianity were worth it all, and whether it would not have been better had Christ never been born and the Christian Church never have come into existence. But as he thought more about it, he saw that people who indulged in such heated debate with one another were making a grave mistake as to what Christianity really was. Christianity, he became convinced, was not a matter of opinions or beliefs, but rather it was a spirit of love and goodness in the heart ; and if any one has this spirit in him, then he has the essential thing, the one thing needful, and it does not matter anything in comparison what opinions he holds, whether Romanist or Protestant, Lutheran or Calvinist. These opinions are things on which each man should be free to decide for himself, and on which he should allow others the same freedom ; and all should hold the truth, or what they believe to be the truth, in love, keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Variety of

opinion in matters of faith, according to Boehme, was as good among Christian people as variety in all other natural things. "Now," he says, "if we dwell with one another, like humble children, in the spirit of Christ, rejoicing at the gift or knowledge of another, who would judge or condemn us? Who judgeth or condemneth the birds in the woods that praise the Lord of all beings with various voices, every one in its own essence? Doth the Spirit of God reprove them for not bringing their voices into one harmony? Doth not the melody of them proceed from his power? Those therefore that strive and wrangle about the knowledge and will of God, and despise one another on that account, are more foolish than the birds in the woods, and the wild beasts that have no understanding. They are more unprofitable in the sight of God than the flowers of the field, which stand still in quiet submission to the Spirit of God, and suffer him to manifest the divine wisdom and power through them. So we need not strive about anything; we have no cause of contention with each other. Let every one only exert himself in learning how he may enter again into the love of God and his brother."

When Law began to read Boehme's writings he was repelled, as most readers are, by their strange jargon; but gradually, he says, "I discovered sound truths and the glimmerings of a deep ground and sense, even in the passages not then clearly intelligible to me, and found myself, as it were, strongly prompted in my heart to dig in these writings. I followed this impulse with continual aspirations and prayer to God for his help and divine illumination, if I was called to understand them. By reading in this manner again and again and from time

to time, I perceived that my heart felt well, and my understanding opened gradually, till at length I found what a treasure was hid in this field."¹ This discovery marks an epoch in the spiritual history of Law, and all that he wrote subsequent to it bears evidence of the profound change it had wrought within him. These subsequent writings include *The Grounds and Reasons of Christian Regeneration* (1739), which he regarded as a short and sufficient exposition of his views ; *The Answer to Dr. Trapp* (1740) ; and the better known works, *The Spirit of Prayer* (part I, 1749) and *The Spirit of Love* (1752).

Law's works, then, fall into two divisions—those that were written before he came under the influence of " the blessed Behmen," " that illumined instrument of God," as he called him, and those that were written after. There can be no doubt that it was his adoption of Boehme's mystical teaching and eccentricities of expression, even more than the fact of his being a Jacobite and a Non-juror, that made him so long distasteful to the religious public generally. Whether, if we were to study his mystical writings as persistently and prayerfully as he studied those of Boehme, we should become reconciled to their curious language and even love it, I cannot say ; but anyhow it is not difficult with ordinary attention to find something of the treasure that is hid in this field—and indeed *The Spirit of Prayer* and *The Spirit of Love* are almost as much appreciated now as is *The Serious Call*, and, by some of the discerning, even more so.

The eighteenth century was the age of reason, though

¹ See Overton, *Life of William Law*, p. 180.

reason, or at least the conception of what was reasonable, was not the same in the minds of all. William Law was a man of his time in seeking to present Christianity as a reasonable faith and life. But, on the other hand, it was the endless and acrimonious disputes of his time that made him seek in Boehme and other mystics for something higher than reason, something above and beyond all that was doubtful and controversial, and this he found, as they had done, in the spirit of love—the love of God and man. This placing of love above reason was the ground of the charge of “enthusiasm” that was brought against him, and enthusiasm was the one thing the eighteenth century could not abide, though it had perforce to suffer it in the persons of the Wesleys and of the Methodist movement generally.

Samuel Johnson, as we have seen, expected to find the *Serious Call* a dull book, but did not. None of Law's books are dull. They sparkle with wit, and are alive with human interest; and, judged by purely literary standards, they must be assigned a very high place.

Law was gifted with a fine irony, and he makes frequent use of this gift in exposing the folly and delusion of people, and particularly of people professing to be Christians. Thus in the earliest of his devotional books, *On Christian Perfection*, we find such character sketches as these: Titius, who “is so temperate and regular, but then he is so great a mathematician that he does not know when Sunday comes”; Philo, whose study of “shells, urns, inscriptions, and broken pieces of pavements, makes the truths of religion and the concerns of Eternity, seem small things in his eyes, fit only for the inquiry of narrow, little and unpolite souls”; Patronus.

who is " an enemy to Dissenters, and loves the Church of England, because of the stateliness and beauty of its buildings ; he never comes to the sacraments, but will go forty miles to see a fine altar-piece " ; Eusebius, a clergyman, who " would be wholly taken up in the cure of souls, but that he is busy in studying the old grammarians, and would fain reconcile some differences among them before he dies " ; Lycia, " whose fault is a lack of seriousness, and who can no more repent, than she can be out of temper, and must be the same sparkling cheerful creature in the Church as in the playhouse " ; Matrona, who " has no profaneness, and if she has no piety, it is owing to this, that she never had a spare half-hour in which to think about it " ; Publius, who " dies with little or no religion, through a constant fear of Popery " ; Siccus, who " might have been a religious man, but that he thought building was the chief happiness of a rational creature : he is all the week amongst dirt and mortar, and stays at home on Sundays to view his contrivances ; he will die more contentedly if his death does not happen whilst some wall is in building " ; and, lastly, there is Silviu, who " laughs at preaching and praying, not because he has any profane principles, or arguments against religion, but because he happens to have been used to nothing but noise, and hunting, and sports." Law says that he has mentioned these various types " to show us that it is not only vices that keep men from the impressions of religion, but that the mere playthings of life, impertinent studies, vain amusements, false satisfactions, idle dispositions, will produce the same effect. A wrong turn of mind, impertinent cares, a succession of the purest trifles, if they take up

our thoughts, leave no room for the cares and fears of true piety."

In *The Serious Call*, Law defines devotion as "a life given or devoted to God," and he goes on to show how this applies to every department of life, and is possible in every occupation in which men are engaged.

"For as all men, and all things in the world as truly belong unto God as any places, things, or persons, that are devoted to Divine service, so all things are to be used, and all persons are to act in their several states and employments, for the glory of God. Men of worldly business, therefore, must not look upon themselves as at liberty to live to themselves, to sacrifice to their own humours and tempers, because their employment is of a worldly nature. But they must consider that, as the world and all worldly professions as truly belong to God, as persons and things that are devoted to the altar, so it is as much the duty of men in worldly business to live wholly unto God, as it is the duty of those who are devoted to Divine service. As the whole world is God's, so the whole world is to act for God. As all men have the same relation to God, as all men have all their powers and faculties from God, so all men are obliged to act for God with all their powers and faculties. As all things are God's, so all things are to be used and regarded as the things of God. Things may and must differ in their use, but yet they are all to be used according to the will of God. Men may and must differ in their employments, but yet they must all act for the same ends, as dutiful servants of God, in the right and pious performance of their several callings." (Chap. iv.)

Had Law taken to the writing of fiction, he might have

rivalled or surpassed his contemporaries Fielding and Richardson ; for his knowledge of human nature and his power of characterisation were at least as great as theirs. And indeed the *Serious Call* might almost be classed as a work of fiction, because of the numerous imaginary characters which its author introduces in order to illustrate the kinds of life which he would have his readers imitate or avoid. There are, for instance, the companion pictures of Flavia and Miranda, two maiden sisters, who have each two hundred pounds a year, but are as different as possible in their spirit and in the manner in which they spend their days and their money. Flavia is delineated scathingly :

“ She is very orthodox, she talks warmly against heretics and schismatics, is generally at Church, and often at Sacrament. If any one asks Flavia to do something in charity, if she likes the person who makes the proposal, or happens to be in a right temper, she will toss him half-a-crown or a crown, and tell him if he knew what a long milliner’s bill she had just received, he would think it a great deal for her to give. She would be a miracle of piety, if she was but half as careful of her soul as she is of her body. The rising of a pimple in her face, the sting of a gnat, will make her keep her room two or three days, and she thinks they are very rash people that do not take care of things in time. This makes her so over-careful for her health that she never thinks she is well enough ; and so over-indulgent that she can never be really well. I shall not take it upon me to say that it is impossible for Flavia to be saved ; but thus much must be said, that she has no grounds from Scripture to think that she is in the way of salvation. For her whole

life is in direct opposition to all those tempers and practices which the Gospel has made necessary to salvation. And here it is to be well observed that the poor, vain turn of mind, the irreligion, the folly, and vanity of this whole life of Flavia, is all owing to the manner of using her estate. It is this that has formed her spirit, that has given life to every idle temper, that has supported every trifling passion, and kept her from all thoughts of a prudent, useful, and devout life." (Chap. vii.) Miranda, on the other hand, is :

"A sober, reasonable, Christian ; as soon as she was mistress of her time and fortune, it was her first thought how she might best fulfil everything that God required of her in the use of them, and how she might make the best and happiest use of this short life. She does not divide her duty between God, her neighbour and herself ; but she considers all as due to God, and so does everything in his name and for his sake. This makes her consider her fortune as the gift of God, that is to be used, as everything is that belongs to God, for the use and reasonable ends of a Christian and holy life. Her fortune therefore is divided betwixt herself and several other poor people, and she has only her part of relief from it ; . . . and she only differs from them in the blessedness of giving. When you see her at work, you see the same wisdom that governs all her other actions ; she is either doing something that is necessary for herself, or necessary for others who want to be assisted. There is scarce a poor family in the neighbourhood, but wears something or other that has had the labour of her hands. When she dies she must shine among Apostles and saints and martyrs ; she must stand among the first servants of

God, and be glorious amongst those who have fought the good fight and finished their course with joy." (Chap. viii.)

Many a father has given advice to his son, but none ever perhaps more wisely than Paternus did "as they were sitting together in the garden, when the child was ten years old." Here is the substance of it.

"You see, my son, this wide and large firmament over our heads, where the sun and moon, and all the stars appear in their turns. If you were to be carried up to any of these bodies at this vast distance from us, you would still discover others as much above you, as the stars that you see here are above the earth. Were you to go up or down, east or west, north or south, you would find the same height without any top, and the same depth without any bottom. And yet, my child, so great is God, that all these bodies added together are but as a grain of sand in his sight. And yet you are as much the care of this great God and Father of all worlds and all spirits, as if he had no son but you, and there was no creature for him to love and protect but you alone. Therefore, fear and worship and love God. Your eyes, indeed, cannot see him. But all things that you see are so many marks of his power and presence, and he is nearer to you than anything that you can see. Take him for your Lord and Father and Friend, look up unto him as the fountain and cause of all the good that you have received from my hands; and reverence me only as the bearer and minister of God's good things unto you. And he that blessed my father before I was born, will bless you when I am dead. Therefore, my child, meditate on these great things; and your soul will

soon grow great and noble by so meditating upon them. Do good first of all to those that most deserve it ; but remember to do good to all. Let every day be a day of humility ; condescend to all the weaknesses and infirmities of your fellow-creatures, cover their frailties, love their excellencies, encourage their virtues, relieve their wants, rejoice in their prosperities, compassionate their distress, receive their friendship, overlook their unkindness, forgive their malice, be a servant of servants. Remember there is but one man in the world with whom you are to have perpetual contention, and be always striving to exceed him, and that is yourself." (Chap. xviii.)

Some of us may have our doubts as to the value of intercessory prayer, but Law believed in it strongly, and he gives his reasons. Among these is the good effect which such prayer has on him who prays.

"Be daily on your knees, in a solemn deliberate performance of this devotion, praying for others in such forms, with such length, importunity, and earnestness as you use for yourself ; and you will find all little, ill-natured passions die away, your heart grow great and generous, delighting in the common happiness of others, as you used only to delight in your own. Such intercessions, besides the great charity of them, would have a mighty effect upon your own heart, as disposing you to the exercise of every other virtue towards such persons as have so often a place in your prayers. This will fill your heart with a generosity and tenderness that will give you a better and sweeter behaviour than anything that is called fine breeding and good manners."

The effect of intercession is shown in the change it

wrought on Ouranius, who is a clergyman in a poor country village. When he began his work there " he had a haughtiness of temper, a great contempt and disregard for all foolish and unreasonable people ; but he has prayed away this spirit. . . . At his first coming to his village, it was as disagreeable to him as a prison, and every day seemed too tedious to be endured in so retired a place. He thought his parish was too full of poor and mean people, that were none of them fit for the conversation of a gentleman. This put him upon a close application to his studies. He kept much at home, writ notes upon Homer and Plautus, and sometimes thought it hard to be called to pray for any poor body, when he was just in the midst of one of Homer's battles. . . . But now his days are so far from being tedious, or his parish too great a retirement, that he now only wants more time to do that variety of good which his soul thirsts after. The solitude of his little parish is become matter of great comfort to him, because he hopes that God has placed him and his flock there to make it their way to heaven. He can now not only converse with but gladly attend and wait upon the poorest kind of people, and is so far from desiring to be considered as a gentleman, that he desires to be used as the servant of all ; and in the spirit of his Lord and Master, girds himself, and is glad to kneel down and wash their feet."

Such was the effect of the practice of intercession on a clergyman. Here is an illustration of its effect on a layman.

" Susurrus was a pious, temperate good man, remarkable for abundance of good qualities. . . . Yet he has a prodigious failing along with these great virtues." He

had a "whispering evil-speaking temper. Susurrus once whispered to a particular friend in great secrecy something too bad to be spoken of publicly. He ended with saying, how glad he was that it had not yet taken wind, and that he had some hopes it might not be true, though the suspicions were very strong. His friend made this reply : ' You say, Susurrus, that you are glad it has not yet taken wind, and that you may have some hopes it may not prove true. Go home, therefore, to your closet, and pray to God, for this man, in such a manner and with such earnestness, as you would pray for yourself on like occasion. Beseech God to interpose in his favour, to save him from false accusers. and bring all those to shame, who by uncharitable whispers and secret stories, wound him, like those that stab in the dark. And when you have made this prayer, then you may, if you please, go tell the same secret to some other friend, that you have told to me.' Susurrus was exceedingly affected with this rebuke, and felt the force of it upon his conscience in as lively a manner, as if he had seen the books opened at the Day of Judgment. All other arguments might have been resisted ; but it was impossible for Susurrus either to reject or to follow this advice, without being equally self-condemned in the highest degree. From that time to this he has constantly used himself to this method of intercession ; and his heart is so entirely changed by it that he can now no more privately whisper anything to the prejudice of another than he can openly pray to God to do people hurt. Whisperings and evil-speakings now hurt his ears like oaths and curses ; and he has appointed one day in the week to be a day of penance as long as he lives, to

humble himself before God, in the sorrowful confession of his former guilt." (Chap. xxi.)

In Law's writings, and especially in those written after he came under the influence of Jacob Boehme, we find a wonderful catholicity of spirit. He felt himself in union not only with every section of the Christian Church, but with all outside who loved God. Like Tauler and the other fourteenth-century mystics, he insists that the one thing needful is the good will, "the desire of the soul turned to God." Thus in a classic passage of *The Spirit of Prayer*, he says :

"There is but one possible way for man to attain this salvation or life of God in the soul. There is not one way for the Jew, another for the Christian, and a third for the Heathen. No ; God is one, human nature is one, salvation is one, and the way to it is one ; and that is the desire of the soul turned to God. When this desire is alive, and breaks forth in any creature under heaven, then the lost sheep is found, and the shepherd hath it upon his shoulders. Through this desire the poor prodigal son leaves his husks and swine, and hastes to his father ; and it is because of this desire that the father sees the son, while yet afar off, that he runs to meet him, falls on his neck, and kisses him. See here how plainly we are taught that no sooner is this desire arisen and in motion towards God, but the operation of God's Spirit answers to it, cherishes and welcomes its first beginnings, signified by the father's seeing and having compassion on his son, whilst yet afar off—that is, in the first beginnings of his desire. Thus does this desire do all ; it brings the soul to God, and God into the soul ; it co-operates with God, and is one life with

God. Suppose this desire not to be alive, not in motion either in a Jew or a Christian, and then all the sacrifices, the services, either of the Law or the Gospel, are but dead works, that bring no life into the soul, nor beget any union between God and it. Suppose this desire to be awakened, and fixed upon God, though in souls that never heard either of the Law or the Gospel, and then the Divine life, or operation of God, enters into them, and the new birth in Christ is formed in those that never heard of his name. And these are they, 'that shall come from the east and from the west, and sit down with Abraham and Isaac in the kingdom of God.' '' (Part i, Chap. ii.) I have spoken of the vital influence which the *Serious Call* and other early writings of Law exercised on the great religious movement of the eighteenth century. May it not be that the teaching of his later and more mystical works, as illustrated by the passage just quoted from *The Spirit of Prayer*, foreshadows the kind of religion which men are looking for now—a religion of broad horizons, drawing together in the unity of the spirit, all in every land who love God and mankind?

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